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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 25 May 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 25 May 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### WALES

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Rail Electrification

1. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on rail electrification in Wales. [905012]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** This Government's rail investment strategy is historic in its scale and ambition, and will benefit passengers in both north and south Wales. We are electrifying the Great Western main line all the way to Swansea, and we are developing the north Wales main line through a £43 million programme of modernisation and investment.

**Christian Matheson:** The Department for Transport seems to be making precious little progress on the Crewe to Chester-north Wales coast electrification, so will the Minister get together with his DFT colleagues and perhaps the Welsh Assembly Government, and I will even come along myself, to get a full engineering survey to find out the costs and the timescale for the electrification process, which is so important to the growth of the area?

**Guto Bebb:** I understand the importance of the north Wales main line to the hon. Gentleman's constituency and the whole of north Wales. We are engaged in a £43 million programme of investment and modernisation and we are seeing the benefits of that investment. For example, there has already been vast improvement in services from Chester to Euston, which also benefits north Wales. I would thoroughly welcome the opportunity to discuss this further with the hon. Gentleman as part of our strategy for a north Wales growth deal.

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Will the Minister join me in welcoming the recent decision by the Office of Rail and Road to permit regular new direct rail services from north Wales and Chester to Manchester airport? Does he agree that journey times remain too lengthy? With that in mind, will he encourage Network Rail to increase line speeds and pave the way for electrification by prioritising the replacement of Victorian signalling systems—works that had been due for completion last year?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend touches on the crucial point. I pay tribute to his work since he came into the House. I remember his first Adjournment debate on north Wales transport links, in which he talked about the importance of the north Wales rail line and the A55. He is right to highlight the fantastic investment from Arriva Trains, which will see a tripling of the services from Llandudno in my constituency to Manchester airport. That development is most welcome to people in north Wales. I thoroughly accept that we need to modernise the signalling system, which is why we have a £47 million programme of investment during control period 5 and control period 6. That has slipped somewhat, which is a shame, but it is interesting to note that it did not preclude the decision by Arriva Trains to increase its services dramatically.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): When the Secretary of State was serving as the Under-Secretary, he met my predecessor to discuss the Pencoed level crossing, which causes a significant amount of chaos in the town and the Ogmore constituency. Will he agree to meet me and constituents from Pencoed to carry on those positive discussions about improving the Pencoed crossing?

**Guto Bebb:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place. I am aware that the Wales Office has been working with local government and the Welsh Government in relation to the Pencoed issue. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman—after all, my first by-election was in Ogmore. It was a very wet by-election. I would be delighted to meet residents of Pencoed once again.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): There is great momentum in north Wales and north-west England to improve transport links. This is a time for the Welsh Government and the UK Government to work together to improve those links. May we therefore have candour? The £43 million that the Minister referred to was actually investment by the Welsh Government, so will the UK Government step up to the plate and invest a penny piece in infrastructure in north Wales? That would be very welcome.

**Guto Bebb:** It is important and imperative that we work together—the Welsh Government, local authorities and the UK Government—in developing transport links throughout north Wales. That is why we have opened the door for a north Wales growth deal, on which we are working in partnership with the Mersey Dee Alliance and the North Wales Economic Ambition Board. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that a real, effective change in north Wales will depend upon co-operation between Westminster and the Welsh Government.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): The new Welsh Government are ready; cross-party and cross-border; Members of Parliament and local authorities are ready; and most important of the lot, we north Walians are very ready. May we have a commitment for proper electrification so that we end up with a growth deal that is worth the name?

**Guto Bebb:** It is imperative that we look carefully at the best value for money from investment in our transport infrastructure. I accept that there is a need to work together, but I also highlight the fact that the CBI and the Federation of Small Businesses this morning called

for more action from the Welsh Government. We hear that £200 million has been allocated for the A55, for example, but we have yet to see any action. We do need to work together; finger-pointing does not help.

### Steel Industry

2. **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to support the steel industry in Wales. [905013]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** With your permission, Mr Speaker, may I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Stephen Crabb), who is now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for the work he did when he was Secretary of State for Wales in all matters supporting Wales, but particularly in relation to the steel industry?

We are doing everything we can to support the sale of Tata Steel UK, including offering support to potential buyers worth hundreds of millions of pounds. Our discussions with buyers, the Welsh Government and the unions continue, and we stand ready to negotiate with the preferred bidder to ensure the future of steelmaking in Wales and across the UK.

**Stephen Kinnock:** As we know, a critical meeting is taking place in Mumbai later today, and the future of the industry is hanging in the balance. What measures have the Secretary of State and his colleagues in the Cabinet taken to ensure that a viable and sustainable pension scheme is developed as a result of the sale of the business? Can he assure the House that it will be sustainable for the 130,000 members of the scheme?

**Alun Cairns:** I have spoken to the Secretary of State for Business since his meetings with Tata in Mumbai. Pensions are rightly one of the issues under consideration, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend highlighted them at the outset, when he said that pensions, plant and power were three of the issues that needed to be addressed. Pensions are an extremely complex issue and cross a number of Departments, but we are determined to find a way through in the interests of the members, the trustees and the company.

8. [905020] **Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): The sale of the steelworks is at a critical stage. It is crucial to the survival of the plant that both Governments act with purpose to support a successful buyer. Has my right hon. Friend agreed a way forward with the First Minister and the Welsh Government in Cardiff Bay to ensure that that is the case?

**Alun Cairns:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he is doing in his constituency, where a number of steelworkers reside, and for the responsible way in which he has pressed issues that are fundamental to a successful steel sale. I met the First Minister earlier this week, and we absolutely agreed that this issue is our priority. We are determined to continue in close dialogue and to work closely together to secure the sale.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): We on the Opposition Benches are solidly with the steelworkers who will be marching through Westminster today. The European

Parliament has voted against giving China market economy status. Will the Secretary of State press his colleagues in the Cabinet to agree to higher tariffs on Chinese steel?

**Alun Cairns:** I look forward, like the hon. Gentleman, to meeting the unions that are marching through Westminster later today. Of course, we are determined to work with the unions and with Tata. However, market economy status for China is separate from the capacity of the European Commission to introduce tariffs. Where tariffs have been introduced, they absolutely work. There are 37 trade defence measures in place at the moment. On wire rod, for example, imports are down by 99%, and I could highlight a range of other speciality steels. So let us not confuse market economy status and the capacity to introduce trade defence measures.

**Hywel Williams:** Steel was a significant element in Wales's £5 billion-worth of exports to the EU in 2015—that is in fact a third of the whole Welsh Government budget. Will the Secretary of State now make the positive case for the advantages to Wales's businesses, jobs and profitability of remaining in the European single market and the European Union?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: 69% of steel produced in the UK is exported to the European Union. Access to that single European market is fundamental to the steel industry, but it is also fundamental to attracting a buyer. That was the very point I was seeking to highlight to business leaders in Swansea last week.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): The steel produced at Port Talbot is transported to Corby and used to produce steel tubes. What steps are Ministers taking to make the case that it is vital to keep that supply chain together as one?

**Alun Cairns:** I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he represents the interests of his constituents. He recognises the interdependency of all these plants—the site in Corby, the site in Port Talbot and other sites across the UK. We talk to suppliers regularly because we need to maintain confidence that they will be able to continue to buy steel. We are determined to find a buyer that is in the interests of workers and the economy.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Is the right hon. Gentleman inspired by the minor miracle that has taken place in Newport, where Mr Sanjeev Gupta and his enterprising workforce have brought the dead Alphasteel company back to productive life? Is not this spirit of entrepreneurship, co-operation among the workforce, hope and confidence the way to stage a renaissance of the entire British steel industry?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman is right that the interest of Sanjeev Gupta in Liberty Steel demonstrates the dynamism in the industry and the great opportunity that is out there. Liberty Steel has reopened a plant that closed some time ago, and it sees that there is a future in British steelmaking. I hope that we will continue to use that momentum to secure steel for the whole of the Tata operations across the UK.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Given the Secretary of State's previous answer on the effectiveness of tariffs, why do the UK Government keep being at the head of a blocking minority for reform of the lesser duty rule? Is it not the case that they simply have not done enough to save the British steel industry?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman is confused about the impact of the lesser duty rule, which relates to the framework. There are currently 37 trade defence measures in place. Where the European Commission has acted within the lesser duty rule, it has had a significant effect, be it in rebar, wire rod, seamless pipes or cold-rolled flat products. I could highlight a whole range of speciality steels where the tariffs are working within the lesser duty rule, because otherwise there would be an impact on other manufacturers and other costs. We need to work within the rule because it currently operates effectively.

### Financial Accountability

3. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What assessment he has made of the financial accountability of the Government in Wales. [905014]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** In order to become truly accountable, the Welsh Government need to take responsibility for raising more of the money that they spend. That is why, as part of the Wales Bill, we will devolve income tax powers to the Welsh Assembly. I look forward to continuing to work alongside the Welsh Government to implement those powers.

**Karl McCartney:** I hope my right hon. Friend agrees that while the Welsh Government are profligate in many ways, the reinstatement of the Aberystwyth to Carmarthen railway via Llanbedr Pont Steffan will be helpful to the entire Welsh economy. Such spending would be welcomed by all the citizens of Wales, who realise that investment in transport infrastructure is a precursor to economic prosperity.

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are several examples of the strange priorities shown by the Welsh Government. Investment in railways is a priority of the UK Government, as shown by the electrification of the line from Swansea through to Paddington. That in itself will provide greater opportunities for rail travel, such as the upgrade of the valleys lines, which, in turn, provides a knock-on, positive effect on more rural communities.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Air passenger duty has already been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and is shortly to be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but despite this, the Budget did not propose that it be devolved to the Welsh Assembly. Will the Secretary of State support the devolution of air passenger duty, and if not, why not?

**Alun Cairns:** Rates of taxation, including air passenger duties, are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, who always keeps levels of taxes under review. The hon. Lady will be well aware that the Treasury is looking at this matter and will report in due course.

13. [905025] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): A few years ago in Boston, Massachusetts, a few revolutionaries said, "No taxation without representation", so does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very important that the Welsh Assembly takes advantage of the Wales Bill and applies its own income tax?

**Alun Cairns:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the continued interest that he shows in Wales. I want the Welsh Assembly to be a mature legislator taking more responsibility for the money that it spends by raising money itself. On that basis, it will become truly accountable to the people of Wales, and will have to look differently at the sorts of spending priorities it has and the commitments it makes.

### Small Business Support

4. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect in Wales of the Government's measures to support small businesses. [905015]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** Small businesses are leading the economic recovery in Wales. There are now 30,000 more small and medium-sized enterprises in Wales, employing 65,000 more people than in 2010. With SMEs accounting for over 99% of all businesses in Wales, the UK Government fully recognise their important contribution to the growth of the Welsh economy.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** The Chancellor's recent Budget announcement that business rates for the smallest businesses will be either greatly reduced or removed has gone down very well. It will have huge advantages for small shops in particular. What steps are the Minister and the Secretary of State taking to make sure that businesses in Wales will also benefit?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend is perfectly right to say that the business rates announcement was welcomed by small businesses in England. The Wales Office is calling on the Welsh Government to replicate the steps taken in England, in order to ensure that small businesses in towns and cities across Wales benefit in the same way from the changes that are being implemented in England, which will allow them to grow and to employ more people in Wales.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): The Welsh Government have done well in attracting inward investment, but in terms of business confidence and Brexit, what will the UK Government do to shore up certainties about the Swansea bay lagoon, electrification and supporting Swansea with a city deal?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the Wales Office is working very closely with the Treasury to develop a Swansea city deal, which will include the electrification of the main line to Swansea. We are also proposing a review of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon in order to look at its viability and to ensure that it will provide value to the taxpayer if it is developed.

**Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): Some 242,000 jobs are directly or indirectly dependent on a successful tourism industry. Will the Minister concede that we



could boost those small businesses either by reducing VAT on hospitality and tourism or by raising the threshold on which they pay VAT?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Gentleman is a champion of this issue and has been ever since I have been in this place. I share his view of the tourism industry in Wales: it is a success story of which we should be justly proud. It is important that the case is made to the Treasury, but I stress that the tourism industry in my constituency and in that of the hon. Gentleman is doing extremely well at present, regardless of any changes to VAT.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): As the Minister well knows, many small businesses in Wales are highly dependent on the steel industry and will have been anxiously awaiting the outcome of today's meeting in Mumbai. The terms of the package that his Government propose will be crucial to any potential deal, so will he confirm that they will do everything it takes to secure a successful future for our steel industry?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the steel industry not just to direct employment but to the supply chains in both north and south Wales. I assure her that the Wales Office and the UK Government are doing everything in their power to ensure that the steel industry and its skilled supply chain are protected in the future.

**Nia Griffith:** Many of our small businesses will also be concerned about the EU referendum, not least those in the Welsh agricultural sector, which received some £350 million a year from the common agricultural policy. The Minister has previously confirmed that, in the event of a Brexit vote, there is absolutely no certainty that his Government would replace those EU funds, so does he agree that it is in the very best interests of Welsh farming and the broader Welsh economy that we vote to remain in the EU on 23 June?

**Guto Bebb:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to highlight the importance of the agricultural industry to Wales. Almost 60,000 people are directly employed within the sector, and more than 95% of all Welsh agricultural exports go to the European Union, so I fully subscribe to her view that the Welsh agricultural sector will be protected if we vote to remain in the EU.

### Employment

5. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of employment in Wales. [905016]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Guto Bebb):** The labour market in Wales is going from strength to strength. Last week's figures delivered a hat-trick of good news for the Welsh economy: employment is up to a new record high, unemployment is down to its lowest level since 2008, and the number of people on the claimant count continues to fall.

**Maria Caulfield:** Do not the Minister's figures show that the Government's welfare reforms are working in Wales and helping employment for ordinary people?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I recently visited Cardiff with the Minister for Employment and it was truly inspiring to hear the team at the Cardiff jobcentre highlight how universal credit and the flexibility it offers is encouraging people back to work.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Minister will have seen this week's Treasury assessment of the impact of withdrawal from the European Union on the UK economy. Could he give us his view of the impact of withdrawal on the Welsh economy?

**Guto Bebb:** The right hon. Gentleman is well aware of my position on this issue. I believe quite passionately that the Welsh economy is stronger for being part of the European Union. Whether for our manufacturing industry, our agriculture industry or our small businesses, I think the stability and certainty of being part of the European Union are good for Wales.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): The unemployment level in Cardiff North is at a record low of 1.7%. Does the Minister agree that to support this trend and keep unemployment down, the new Welsh Government have to deliver on infrastructure promises such as the M4 relief road and the south Wales Metro, towards which this Government have given hundreds of millions of pounds?

**Guto Bebb:** My hon. Friend has been a great champion for the capital city of Wales since he was elected to this place. The £500 million contribution of the UK Government to the city deal in Cardiff will be essential for employment, growth and the continued success of Cardiff, but we need to keep up the pressure. The question marks over the M4 relief road are a barrier to growth in south Wales, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise his concerns about those delays. [Interruption.]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A great many people in Wales will be attending to our proceedings, and I must also inform the House that today we are visited by the eminent figure Cardinal Charles Bo from Rangoon in Burma. We want to impress him not only with the quality of our interrogation but with the decency of our behaviour, so a little less noise would be helpful.

### S4C

6. **Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): What the Government's plans are for the future of S4C. [905017]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** I was delighted to visit S4C last week to see at first hand the exciting developments at the channel, including the launch of its HD service in time for the European championship. I am sure we all wish Chris Coleman and the boys well.

**Jonathan Edwards:** What assurances can the Secretary of State give us that the UK Government's review of S4C will not be compromised, as it will be conducted after the BBC's charter review? Can he confirm that all options will be on the table, including securing an

independent financial stream for S4C funded from revenues raised for public service broadcasting, and from direct Government support?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman will recognise that a fundamental principle is operational and editorial independence. The BBC White Paper offers protection and support for S4C, but, of course, there is a review ongoing that will look at all these matters, such as governance and financing, in order to secure a long-term future for the channel. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Let us hear Mr Glyn Davies.

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): S4C is crucial to Wales, and particularly to the Welsh language. Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State agree that the Welsh language is too often seen as the secondary language in Wales? It is not a secondary language; it is at least equal first.

**Alun Cairns:** This Government have a strong record of supporting S4C, and previous Conservative Governments have a strong record of establishing S4C, introducing the Welsh Language Act 1993 and turning around the decline in the Welsh language that we saw previously. We should be rightly proud of the language of our culture and our heritage—a true Conservative policy.

### EU Membership

7. **Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on Wales of the UK leaving the EU. [905019]

9. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on Wales of the UK leaving the EU. [905021]

**The Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** At the February European Council, the Government negotiated a new settlement, giving the United Kingdom a special status in a reformed European Union. As I said in my speech in Swansea last week, I believe that Wales and the UK will be stronger, safer and better off remaining in a reformed European Union.

**Richard Arkless:** Eighty per cent. of Welsh farmers depend on common agricultural policy payments from the European Union, and the vast majority export their goods to the European Union. Given that Wales receives £245 million more from the European Union than it puts in, what assurances can the Secretary of State give us that the loss to those farmers will be plugged by the UK Government in the event of Brexit?

**Alun Cairns:** The Welsh economy is showing some spectacular employment figures at the moment, with more people in work than ever before, the claimant count falling and an unemployment rate well below the UK average. This economic success is based on a stable economic policy, and all the independent forecasts from the OECD, the IMF, the Governor of the Bank of England and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor show that there would be a negative impact should we leave the single European market.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** EU programmes such as Erasmus bring enormous benefits to young people in Wales, broadening their experience and strengthening their employability. Does the Secretary of State agree that ensuring Welsh students can continue to benefit from such programmes is just one of the many good reasons to vote remain?

**Alun Cairns:** I would like to advise the House and the hon. Gentleman that the Erasmus programme was developed by a Port Talbot man some years ago. It has provided fantastic opportunities for students across Europe to share best practice and broaden the base of their knowledge. Of course, the European Investment Bank has also invested hugely in higher education and the new campus at Swansea University, worth more than £450 million, has benefited from such diversification.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): The Secretary of State will surely have seen yesterday's Cardiff University report showing that Britain pays nearly £10 billion a year net to be part of the European Union. Does he agree that, under the Barnett formula, that money could leave Wales £500 million better off if we vote leave on 23 June?

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend is of course failing to recognise that independent forecasters—whether the IMF, the OECD or the Governor of the Bank of England—have talked about the negative impact Brexit would have on the Welsh economy. A £2 billion reduction in the scale of the economy, costing 24,000 jobs, is a step we cannot afford to take.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): Is it the case that Wales Office special advisers recently had a meeting with representatives of the Britain Stronger in Europe campaign, and if so, what did they discuss?

**Alun Cairns:** We of course discuss a range of issues that affect the Welsh economy. A Brexit vote would of course affect the Welsh economy in a negative way, with a £2 billion cost to the Welsh economy, costing 24,000 jobs. As we speak, we are seeing some spectacular employment data, but they are based on strong economic foundations and access to 500 million customers across Europe.

11. [905023] **Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Given that Wales is already underfunded by the Barnett formula and the UK Government, what detailed guarantees can the Secretary of State give that the £245 million actually reaches Wales?

**Alun Cairns:** I do not necessarily recognise the basis of the question. The hon. Lady forgets the historic funding floor, which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor introduced at 115%. That demonstrates the strength of the commitment that this Government are showing to Wales.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the fact that Toyota has made it clear it will continue to manufacture in the United Kingdom, including at its engine plant in Wales, regardless of whether the British people vote to leave the EU on 23 June?

**Alun Cairns:** I certainly recognise the comments made by Toyota. It has specifically said that “British membership of the EU is best for our operations and their long term competitiveness.”

Of course, it is not only Toyota; 150 component industries in the automotive sector depend on companies such as Toyota and Ford which all want us to remain part of the single European market.

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to questions to the Prime Minister.

**The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne)** *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman is a bit ahead of himself. There is a process to be followed. He can wait his turn.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*  
**Engagements**

Q1. [905062] **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 25 May.

**The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne):** Thank you very much, Mr Speaker—as always. The Prime Minister is attending the G7 in Japan, and I have been asked to reply on his behalf. This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House, I will have further such meetings later today.

**Maria Caulfield:** I am sure Labour Members will disagree, but the first priority of any Government has to be the defence and security of our country, so will the Chancellor outline the steps this Government are taking to replace our Trident nuclear deterrent?

**Mr Osborne:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The first duty of the Government is to defend the country. For almost 70 years our independent nuclear deterrent has provided the ultimate insurance for our freedom. We will review our Trident deterrent, and bring forward votes in this House; we ask MPs from all sides of the House to support this vital commitment to our national security. When she stands up, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), representing the Labour party, should indicate that support today.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): We look forward to the vote on Trident—he should get on with it.

Given the overnight news of the French authorities’ dawn raid on Google, investigating allegations of aggravated financial fraud and money laundering, does the Chancellor now regret calling his cosy little tax deal with the same company “good news” for the British taxpayer?

**Mr Osborne:** It is good news that we are collecting money in tax from companies that paid no tax when the Labour party was in office. The hon. Lady seems to forget that she was the Exchequer Secretary in the last

Labour Government; perhaps she can tell us whether she ever raised the tax affairs of Google with the Inland Revenue at the time.

**Ms Eagle:** Obviously, the Chancellor has done a bit more research this time. I regard that as a compliment.

From that answer, I think the Chancellor is far too easily satisfied with his cosy little tax deal. I note that even the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) labelled that deal “derisory”. The British public think it is even worse. Despite all the rhetoric, on the Chancellor’s watch the tax gap has gone up, and his tax deal with the Swiss raised a fraction of the revenue that he boasted it would. The Office for Budget Responsibility has blamed the lack of resources in Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, so why has he sacked 11,000 tax staff since 2010, and when is he going to give HMRC the resources it needs to do a proper job?

**Mr Osborne:** We increased resources for HMRC to tackle tax evasion and avoidance. We have introduced a diverted profits tax so that companies such as Google cannot shift their profits offshore anymore, and have made sure that banks pay a higher tax charge than they ever did under the last Labour Government. I come back to this question. The hon. Lady was a Treasury Minister. She stood at this Dispatch Box. She is asking me what we have done to tackle tax evasion and avoidance. When she was Exchequer Secretary, did she ever raise the tax affairs of Google? We should know that before she asks questions of this Government. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members must calm themselves, and remain calm. Members on both sides should take their lead from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who always sits calmly and in a statesmanlike manner. That is the way to behave.

**Ms Eagle:** We all have a great deal of respect for the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). The Chancellor of the Exchequer will know that the Exchequer Secretary deals with taxes on vices, not on Google. I did my job in taxing vices when I was in the Treasury. The Chancellor will be judged on results. He has been in office for six years. Given that France is demanding 10 times more from Google than he is, the public will make their own judgment.

Labour is campaigning to ensure that the UK remains in the European Union because that is the best way to defend rights at work as well as jobs and prosperity, but the Conservative party is split right down the middle and is descending into vicious acrimony. Last week the Minister of State for Employment called for Brexit, so that there could be a bonfire of workers’ rights. Does the Chancellor agree with her, or does he agree with Len McCluskey that a vote to stay in the European Union is the best deal for Britain’s workers?

**Mr Osborne:** First, the hon. Lady has confirmed that when she was in the Treasury she asked absolutely no questions about the tax affairs of Google. As she knows—we agree on this—I think it is better that Britain remains in the European Union, so why not now have some consensus on other issues, such as an independent nuclear deterrent? Let us have a consensus on that, and on supporting, rather than disparaging,



businesses. Let us have a consensus on not piling debts on the next generation, but on dealing with our deficit, and a consensus that the parties in this House should have a credible economic policy.

**Ms Eagle:** I think the Chancellor has just agreed with Len McCluskey.

The former Work and Pensions Secretary said this week that the Chancellor's Brexit report should not be believed by anyone, and he branded the Chancellor "Pinocchio", with his nose just getting longer and longer with every fib. Meanwhile, the general secretary of the TUC said that the Treasury report gives us "half a million good reasons to stay in the European Union".

Who does the Chancellor think that the public should listen to? His former Cabinet colleague, or the leader of Britain's millions of trade unionists?

**Mr Osborne:** It is no great revelation that different Conservative MPs have different views on the European Union. That is why we are having a referendum, because this issue divides parties, families and friends, and we made a commitment in our manifesto that the British people would decide this question. If the hon. Lady wants to talk about divisions in parties, I observe that while she is sitting here, the leader of the Labour party is sitting at home, wondering whether to impeach the former leader of the Labour party for war crimes.

**Ms Eagle:** I am glad that the Chancellor agrees with Frances O'Grady, but it is a pity that he cannot get half his Back Benchers, and most of his own party, to agree with him. Given that the former Work and Pensions Secretary has just called the Prime Minister "disingenuous", and that the former Tory Mayor of London has called him "demented", I would not talk about Labour splits. The Chancellor should get his own House in order before he talks about us.

Following the Chancellor's second omnishambles Budget earlier this year, I see that his approval ratings have collapsed by 80 points among his own party. Given that he seems to be following a similar career path, is it time that he turned to Michael Portillo for advice? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. This question will be heard. Those prating away should cease doing so. It is stupid, and counterproductive.

**Ms Eagle:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Last week, the former would-be leader, Michael Portillo, said of the Queen's Speech:

"After 23 years of careful thought about what they would like to do in power, and the answer is nothing... There is nothing they want to do with office or power... The government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing."

Even this "nothing" Queen's Speech has caused a revolt on the Chancellor's Back Benches, and forced yet another U-turn to avoid the first defeat of a Government on their legislative programme for 92 years. Does that tell us all we need to know about this Prime Minister and Chancellor? It seems that they cannot even get their Back Benchers to vote for nothing without a fight.

**Mr Osborne:** I will tell the hon. Lady what we have done in recent weeks: we have taken another million people out of tax; we have frozen fuel duty; we have cut

business rates for small businesses; we have seen the deficit fall by another £16 billion; we have delivered a record number of jobs; and we have introduced a national living wage. That is what we have been up to. What has Labour been up to? She talks about U-turns. They have turned the Labour party from a party that gave Britain its nuclear deterrent to a party that wants to scrap it; from a party that created the academies programme but now wants to abolish all academies; and from a party that once courted business but now disparages it—the prawn cocktail offensive is just plain offensive these days. As a result, it has gone from a Labour party that won elections to a Labour party that is going to go on losing elections.

**Ms Eagle:** With 29 days to go until the most important decision this country has faced in a generation, we have before us a Government in utter chaos—split down the middle and at war with themselves. The stakes could not be higher, yet the Government are adrift at the mercy of their own rebel Back Benchers, unable to get their agenda through Parliament. Instead of providing the leadership the country needs, they are fighting a bitter proxy war over the leadership of their own party. I notice there is no "outer" here: all the Brexiteers have been banished from the Government Front Bench. *[Interruption.]* It is nice to see the Justice Secretary here. I think the Chancellor has put the rest of his Brexit colleagues in detention. Instead of providing the leadership the country needs, they are fighting a bitter proxy war over the leadership of their own party. Instead of focusing on the national interest, they are focusing on narrow self-interest. What we need is a Government who will do the best for Britain. What we have got is a Conservative party focused only on itself.

**Mr Osborne:** The hon. Lady talks about our parliamentary party. Let us look at her parliamentary party. They are like rats deserting a sinking ship. A shadow Health Minister wants to be the Mayor of Liverpool, the hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) wants to be the Mayor of Manchester, and the shadow Home Secretary wants to be the Mayor of both cities. When we said we were creating job opportunities we did not mean job opportunities for the whole shadow Cabinet. They are like a parliamentary party on day release when the hon. Lady is here, but they know the right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) will be back and it is four more years of hard labour.

Today, we are voting on a Queen's Speech that delivers economic security, protects our national security and enhances life chances for the most disadvantaged. It does not matter who stands at the Dispatch Box for Labour these days. They are dismantling our defences, they are wrecking our economy and they want to burden people with debt. In their own report published this week, "Labour's Future"—surprisingly long—they say they are becoming increasingly irrelevant to the working people of Britain.

Q5. [905066] **Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): What a privilege it is to be called by you, Mr Speaker. If the remain team have their day on 24 June, I shall have to apply by email to Herr Juncker to ask a question.

Airbus is a wonderful example of European co-operation—European, not EU—with fuselages built in France and Germany and wings built in this country. Planes

cannot fly without wings. Our remaining inside or outside the EU will have no effect on this business, for, as the Chancellor knows, it is trade and the hard work of businessmen and businesswomen that creates jobs and prosperity, not politicians and bureaucrats. It is their job to nurture growth and enterprise—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am looking for a question mark.

**Richard Drax:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is their job to nurture and not to make threats to business, enterprise, jobs and aspiration?

**Mr Osborne:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend that jobs and enterprise are created through the ingenuity of private businesses that we in the House should support and nurture.

**Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP):** Lachlan Brain is seven years old and attends the Gaelic medium primary school in Dingwall in the Scottish highlands. Next week, the Home Office—I see the Home Secretary briefing the Chancellor—plans to deport him and his family, despite the fact that he arrived as part of a Scottish Government initiative backed by the Home Office to attract people to live and work in the region. The case has been front-page news in Scotland and raised repeatedly in the House. What does he have to say to the Brain family and the community, which wants them to stay?

**Mr Osborne:** As I understand it, the family do not meet the immigration criteria, but the Home Secretary says she is very happy to write to the right hon. Gentleman on the details of the case.

**Angus Robertson:** I am sorry but this has been going on for weeks and that answer frankly is not good enough. Appeals have been made to the Home Secretary by the Scottish First Minister, the local MP, the local Member of the Scottish Parliament and the community, and it is wall to wall across the media of Scotland, yet the Chancellor of the Exchequer clearly knew nothing about it. The problem in the highlands of Scotland is not immigration but emigration. Even at this late stage, will the Chancellor, who knows nothing about it, speak to the Home Secretary and Prime Minister and get this sorted out?

**Mr Osborne:** As I said, the Home Secretary will write to the right hon. Gentleman with the details of the case, but may I make a suggestion to the Scottish National party? It now has substantial tax and enterprise powers, so if it wants to attract people to the highlands of Scotland, why does it not create an entrepreneurial Scotland that people want to move to from the rest of the UK in order to grow a business and have a successful life?

**Q6. [905067] Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** Why is the Chilcot report not being published before the EU referendum? Is it because the Prime Minister and the Chancellor do not want the public reminded, ahead of the EU referendum, of how the Government of the day and the establishment are prepared to produce dodgy

dossiers, make things up and distort the facts to con the public into supporting something they otherwise would not?

**Mr Osborne:** No, it is because it is an independent report and the inquiry team decides when to produce it.

**Q2. [905063] Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab):** In the spirit of consensus, may I say that few things unite the House more than a concentration on the periodic reviews of the Boundary Commission, which are studied with fierce intensity and result in covetous eyes occasionally being cast on neighbouring constituencies? We note, however, that the electorates of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the City of Westminster have declined precipitously and against all logic. Does the Chancellor believe that the Prime Minister should be concerned about this? If so, what should he be doing?

**Mr Osborne:** I thought the hon. Gentleman was the Member of Parliament for Ealing North. The Boundary Commission is doing its work and drawing up boundaries independently—that is a good thing about our country—and we will see its initial proposals later this year, I think.

**Q11. [905072] Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** Will the Chancellor join me in congratulating Barnardo's, the UK's oldest and largest children's charity, which this year celebrates 150 years of supporting and protecting vulnerable children? Does he agree that young people need support beyond the age of 18 to maximise their life chances and that the Government's new care leavers covenant, which extends the duty of care to 25, is therefore a fitting way to build on Barnardo's proud history of giving young people the best opportunities in life?

**Mr Osborne:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend that Barnardo's is a brilliant charity and that we should all congratulate it on the work it does. We have a huge responsibility to people who are in the care of the state, which does not end when they are 18 years old. That is why we are announcing new measures in the Queen's Speech to include support from a personal adviser, for example, until these people are 25 and to make sure that other bodies such as local authorities have a care for those people, bringing all the opportunities to their attention. This is part of the life chances strategy, which lies at the heart of this Queen's Speech.

**Q3. [905064] Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab):** The Chancellor wanted a march of the makers, and today hundreds of steelworkers are marching to Parliament for their future and for their communities. Why do the Government back China's bid for market economy status against the interests of British steelworkers? Why does this Chancellor block changes to the lesser duty tariff against the interests of British steelworkers? When will he set down an industrial strategy to put British steelworkers' interests ahead of his own?

**Mr Osborne:** Our thoughts are, of course, with the steelmakers and their families at this very difficult time. [*Interruption.*] If we take a step back, we can all

acknowledge that there is a global crisis in the steel industry, with tens of thousands of jobs lost across Europe alone and many tens of thousands beyond that. We are taking specific action today to help Tata, Port Talbot and related works across the country. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary has been to India with the First Minister of Wales in a cross-party effort. Nationally, we have taken action to reduce energy charges on energy-intensive industries; we have taken action to ensure that there is more flexibility with emission regulations; we are doing everything we can to help this industry at a very difficult time, including making sure that there are tough tariffs on Chinese dumping. As a result of the tariffs introduced on rebar steel, those imports are down by over 90%.

**Q12.** [905073] **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): Will the Chancellor confirm reports in the press today that former Labour Minister, Lord Sugar has joined the Government as our new enterprise tsar? Does he agree that this is a sign of people abandoning Labour for the prosperity, security and jobs offered by this Government? Will the Chancellor finally confirm that he has no new plans for a sugar tax?

**Mr Osborne:** I can confirm that we have hired Lord Sugar to advise on enterprise. He will bring his knowledge and expertise to that task. Apparently, Lord Sugar has told the Labour party, “You’re fired.”

**Q4.** [905065] **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I have a 14-year-old autistic constituent, who got on very well at primary school, but since moving to secondary school, its uncompromising one-size-fits-all approach has left him with a special school as his only option. What will the Chancellor do to make sure that when the independent expert group looking at initial teacher training reports back, Ministers will ensure that specific autism training forms part of their curriculum?

**Mr Osborne:** The hon. Lady raises an important issue, and I think she will receive a lot of sympathy from colleagues of all parties. The Education Secretary shares her concern and has personally raised the issue with the chair of the initial teacher training review, Stephen Munday. My right hon. Friend has stressed the importance of ensuring that teachers are properly trained to support young people with special educational needs and specifically autism. As a result, the chairman will include recommendations in the report on how core teacher training should cover special educational needs. The report will be published shortly.

**Q15.** [905076] **Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): My local clinical commissioning group is currently consulting on its appalling plans to downgrade A&E at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary. Does the Chancellor agree with me and with thousands of “Hands Off HRI” campaigners, led by Karl Deitch, that all options should remain on the table and that a plan B must come forward to keep good-quality local health services?

**Mr Osborne:** My hon. Friend is a strong champion of his local area, and we all know that Huddersfield Royal Infirmary has been struggling with the private finance initiative contract that it signed under the last Labour Government. Any service changes must be made by the local NHS, and must be based on clear evidence that

they will deliver better outcomes for patients. It is right for these decisions to be made by local clinicians rather than by politicians, but they must meet the four key tests that have been set out: they must demonstrate public and patient engagement, have the support of GP commissioners, be based on clinical evidence, and take account of patient choice. I expect the local NHS to consider all those options in reaching any decision.

**Q7.** [905068] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): The House of Commons Library estimates that 4.9 million UK citizens live or work in other countries, yet in my surgeries, week in, week out, I meet constituents from overseas who cannot obtain visas, residency or citizenship here. The whole of Scotland is outraged at the threat of deportation facing the Brain family. What, in the Chancellor’s view, is the difference between an economic migrant and an expat?

**Mr Osborne:** I think all the hon. Gentleman is demonstrating is that we do have border controls in this country, and that we do have immigration rules that need to be complied with. That is a very important aspect of the European Union’s Schengen area agreement, which we are not part of, and I think that it is part of the special status that we have in the European Union.

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Chancellor join me in welcoming the crew of HMS Duncan—the last and best of our Type 45 destroyers, which is currently moored in London for the commemorations of the battle of Jutland—some of whom are watching from the Gallery today? Will he also support the work that is being done by the all-party parliamentary group on the armed forces covenant to ensure that all our armed forces and their families have the very best housing that we can offer them?

**Mr Osborne:** I certainly join my hon. Friend in welcoming the crew of HMS Duncan, and in celebrating all that they do on behalf of this country to keep us safe and to represent Britain around the world. In return, we owe them a duty of care, and the armed forces covenant enshrines that duty. No such covenant existed before we came into Downing Street, and now that we are in Downing Street we are honouring our promises to Britain’s armed services and to the Royal Navy.

**Q8.** [905069] **Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): Not content with just trebling tuition fees, the Government want to raise them even higher. Why has the Chancellor changed his view since 2003, when he said that tuition fees were a tax on learning?

**Mr Osborne:** Back then, the Labour party was voting for tuition fees. The difference is this: we have learnt our lesson, and Labour Members have forgotten theirs. As a result, we have a credible higher education policy that is giving us the best universities in the world, a record number of students, and, crucially, a record number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds—which the Labour party said would never happen—and, in contrast, Labour Members have a completely incredible policy to abolish the tuition fees that they themselves introduced and create a £10 billion hole in the public finances. It is time that they were straight with students and made it



clear that that is completely unaffordable, and that we go on funding our higher education system and asking graduates who are going to earn more, on average, than other taxpayers to contribute to their education.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): St Albans and many other areas in the south and east value their green belt. According to figures from the Office for National Statistics, 3 million people may come into this country if we remain in the European Union. Would the Chancellor like to suggest which bits of the green belt—about a quarter of a million acres—will be needed, and where they will be? We need to provide homes and infrastructure for those people.

**Mr Osborne:** We have made a clear commitment to protecting the green belt, and the planning laws that we have introduced, and propose to introduce, meet that commitment.

My hon. Friend and I disagree on European Union membership—and I have seen no particular evidence from the leave campaigners that immigration would fall; indeed, they seem to be telling some communities that they would let more people in—but let us at least agree on this. We will have a referendum, and, in the end, it will not be up to my hon. Friend or me to decide. It will be up to the British people.

**Q9.** [905070] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): No one should underestimate public support for the BBC. In the last week, more than 200,000 people have signed a petition about the removal of the recipes website. The Government may have been forced to pull back from some of their more extreme proposals, but there is still plenty to cause concern. Will the Chancellor agree to hold a debate and a vote on the Floor of the House, so that Members of Parliament can provide the parliamentary scrutiny that the charter renewal properly deserves?

**Mr Osborne:** We want a great BBC—a great public broadcaster—and we have agreed a deal with the BBC that it has welcomed. The specific issue that the hon. Lady raises was an operational decision by the BBC, not a decision taken by members of the Government. I have made the observation that we have a great national public broadcaster in the BBC but we do not want a great public newspaper in the form of the BBC. As newspapers increasingly move online, the BBC—as it has itself acknowledged—wants to be careful about what information it has on its website, so that we can also have a flourishing private press. I think that the BBC has got that balance right.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Will the Chancellor explain why the House of Commons Library and ONS figures for 2015 clearly show that although we export 44% of our goods and services within the single market, we run a disastrous loss or deficit on those exports of £68 billion per annum, up £9 billion since last year alone, in relation to the other 27 member states, whereas Germany runs a profit or surplus of a massive £82 billion in relation to those same 27 states? Is not that a bad deal?

**Mr Osborne:** We are a massive exporter of services; our services represent 80% of the British economy. We are home to one of the most successful car industries in

Europe, and we export cars to the continent. We are also home to the world's second largest aerospace industry and part of a European supply chain. That is why those leading businesses are in favour of our membership of the European Union. My hon. Friend and I disagree on this issue, but we stood together on a manifesto to have a referendum and to let the British people decide.

**Q10.** [905071] **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Headteachers and NHS and private sector employers in my constituency are telling me that they have few if any qualified applicants for a range of skilled roles, and that too many experienced staff are leaving. The single most common reason for this key worker crisis is the cost of rental and purchased housing in west London, which the Government's housing policies will not address. Even the subsidies to buy—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to have to say to the hon. Lady that we now need one sentence with a question mark at the end of it, and it had better be a short one. Sorry, but we must press on.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Will the Chancellor acknowledge this recruitment and retention crisis and do something about it?

**Mr Osborne:** Of course, we have 25,000 more clinically trained staff in our national health service, but I completely agree with the hon. Lady that there is a challenge of housing in London. I met the new Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, earlier this week and we are going to see where we can agree on policies that will help to address that issue.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): In my right hon. Friend's enthusiasm to bludgeon the British voter into supporting a European Union that they do not really like, how can he justify planning to break the law? Is he aware that the Public Administration Committee has now published three legal opinions from Speaker's Counsel—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I hope that this sentence is coming to an end and that there will be a question mark at the end of it. Very briefly!

**Mr Jenkin:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Public Administration Committee has now published three legal opinions from Speaker's Counsel that make it perfectly clear that it is illegal for the Government to keep their pro-EU propaganda up on Government websites during the purdah period?

**Mr Osborne:** Of course the Government will comply with the law and the Government websites will comply with the purdah rules. We are confident that they do so. May I make a general observation? My hon. Friend and I have fought for this referendum and it is now taking place. There are huge issues at stake about Britain's economy, Britain's security and Britain's place in the world, and we have perfectly honourable disagreements on those big issues. Let us debate the substance rather than the process, so that the British people can feel that they have had a range of opinions and can make their own minds up.



Q13. [905074] **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): The care sector faces a crisis made worse by the Chancellor's failure to fund increases in the minimum wage properly. The 2% social care precept does not cover all the costs, so the Local Government Association asked the Chancellor to bring forward £700 million of better care funding from 2019 to this year and next year to help with the increased costs. Will the Chancellor listen to local councils and will he fund his own minimum wage policy?

**Mr Osborne:** Of course, we always listen to local authorities and are in dialogue with them, but we have given them the power, which many have used, to apply a social care precept, which came in in April in many areas. At the same time, we have put more money into the better care fund, and we are therefore confident that social care is funded. However, I agree with the hon. Lady that more needs to be done to help the social care sector, and the key thing here will be integration with the national health service over coming years so that the service is much more seamless for our citizens.

**Sir Edward Garnier** (Harborough) (Con): At the Conservative party conference last year, our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that the future that we, the state, provide for children in care was shameful—the dole and an early grave or the streets. Yesterday, the Prison Reform Trust, of which I am a trustee, produced a report identifying that far too high a proportion of

children in care come into contact with the criminal justice system. Will my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and the Prime Minister ensure that policies are implemented right across Government to prevent unnecessary contact between children in care and the criminal justice system, so that those children can have a good future?

**Mr Osborne:** My right hon. and learned Friend speaks powerfully. We of course must have a care system that does the very best for children who find themselves in it. As I said in reply to an earlier question, the Queen's Speech contains measures in that respect. The other thing that we are doing with my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor is reforming our prison system so that, yes, people are punished for crimes, but that they also have a chance to rehabilitate themselves. That is one of the social reforms of which I am proudest to be part.

Q14. [905075] **Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): A Southampton letting agency has recently been banned from trading for three years for not giving tenants their deposits back, using them for other purposes. Letting agencies are almost completely unregulated, and it is pot luck whether Southampton residents actually get a fair deal. Does the Chancellor intend to do anything about that?

**Mr Osborne:** We are looking at what we can do to make sure that people who rent have proper consumer protection, including protection from landlords who withhold deposits unreasonably.

## Points of Order

12.42 pm

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, points of order. It is usually at least a three-course meal in my experience. We will start with Anne Main.

**Mrs Main:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I just heard the Chancellor say that we should debate the substance and not the process in our debates on the EU referendum. As I let you know this morning, Mr Speaker, I have tried to do exactly that. I have written numerous questions, but I am basically getting answers that say, "Talk to the hand." I approached the Procedure Committee, which admitted that I have not had substantial answers, or indeed any answers, to some questions. What more can be done? The Government are trying to muzzle those of us who are trying to get to the truth of all this. They are trying to ensure that we do not get any answers. The Government are acting disgracefully, and I am ashamed at their behaviour.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order and for her courtesy in giving me advance notice of its thrust. I also note that she has expressed her disappointment in the Government in very forceful terms. She is most assiduous in pursuing this matter, and I say to her that it is, to put it mildly, regrettable that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills is late in responding to a request from the Procedure Committee. That should not happen. If there is a Whip on the Treasury Bench, he or she should note that it is frankly unacceptable. If there is not, that message should be relayed to the relevant Whip sooner rather than later. I am sure that the lapse, which will be very unsatisfactory, not least to the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), and his colleagues on the Committee, will have been noted on the Treasury Bench. I hope that it will be duly communicated to the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

If the hon. Member for St Albans (Mrs Main) has tabled questions that are orderly—they would not be on the Order Paper unless they were adjudged to be orderly—they should receive replies and quickly. My advice to the hon. Lady is to look for those replies each day from now on. If she does not get them, I rather imagine that she will return to the subject. In the interests of propriety, however, the Department should now provide those answers. Its performance is unsatisfactory. I do not want to use the word "shameful", but it is unsatisfactory.

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, the House had a comprehensive debate on the Government's foreign policy and, in particular, its role in arms deals with Saudi Arabia. I put it to the Government that an urgent investigation should take place, following new evidence showing that UK bombs

have been used in Yemen. At yesterday's Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions, the Foreign Secretary stated that

"the Ministry of Defence is urgently investigating the allegations, and I believe there will be an urgent question on this subject shortly."—[*Official Report*, 24 May 2016; Vol. 611, c. 395.]

This morning, the Ministry of Defence gave a statement to the BBC World Service that contradicts the Foreign Secretary's comments yesterday. The MOD statement says:

"We are not launching an investigation, we are seeking urgent clarification from Saudi Arabia as to whether or not these weapons have been used in the recent conflict and that is our usual policy."

Have either the Foreign Secretary or his office asked you whether he can come to the House to clarify the position?

**Mr Speaker:** No, no request to issue a clarification has been made to me. If memory serves me correctly, the line of the Government that no investigation is under way was put by the Defence Secretary in response to the urgent question yesterday—that is my recollection—although, as the hon. Lady says, that is a different stance from that proffered by the Foreign Secretary at oral questions. It is not entirely novel for there to be different statements on the same subject emanating from representatives of different Departments. If a Minister thinks, in the light of the facts, that he needs to correct the record of what he said—I think the hon. Lady has the Foreign Secretary in mind in this context—doubtless he will do so. If he does not, it is presumably because he judges there to be no need. In that situation, the hon. Lady must table questions if she wants further elucidation, but it would be useful to have clarity on the matter.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Thursday 19 May, the shadow Minister for Europe, the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), visited Sawley in my constituency, where she gave a radio interview in which she described one of my constituents—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I must ask the hon. Lady what on earth what was said outside the Chamber could possibly have to do with me in the Chair.

**Maggie Throup:** I think it reflects badly on every Member of Parliament—

**Mr Speaker:** All sorts of things reflect badly or well, but it has got nothing to do with the Chair. If the Chair took responsibility for what people said outside this Chamber, I really would have a very, very large responsibility indeed. It is very kind of the hon. Lady if she wishes to invest me with that sort of imperial power, but I do not think I have it and I doubt the House would want me to either.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) raised the issue of the Brain family in my constituency, the Chancellor of the Exchequer replied by saying that he would write to my right hon. Friend. This family are due to be deported in the next few days, and I am concerned about the timeliness of a letter, if that was to

be written to my right hon. Friend. What routes are open to me to make sure that this case is urgently addressed, through the Home Secretary, to respect what was put in place at the time the family came here—that the post-work study visa would be in place—so that we do not deport this family, who are a credit to the highlands?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. My short answer to his inquiry is that if the matter is urgent, in his judgment, he knows the recourse available to him, and it would then be for the Chair to judge whether the matter was urgent. Perhaps we can leave it there for now. The right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) is stirring in his seat. *[Interruption.]* No, he does not have a point of order. Well, it is one thing to play with one's own hair, but it is another thing to play with somebody else's. I wondered whether there was a point of order brewing from the right hon. Gentleman, but there was not on this occasion—another time. I am sure he was being helpful.

## Debate on the Address

[5TH DAY]

*Debate resumed (Order, 24 May).*

*Question again proposed,*

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

## Education, Skills and Training

**Mr Speaker:** I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

12.50 pm

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): I beg to move an amendment, at the end of the Question to add:

“but respectfully regret that the Gracious Speech contained proposals to enable further increases in tuition fees; believe that there should be no further increases in tuition fees; and further believe that no good or outstanding school should be forced to become an academy.”.

I am reeling from the prospect of public hair playing and from considering whether we should have a rule against it in this House.

Last Wednesday, we saw the age-old ceremony of the State Opening of Parliament. It was all done with the usual pageantry, and it was timed and executed to perfection as we have all come to expect. The only flaw was the one thing over which Her Majesty has absolutely no control, and that is the actual content of the Gracious Speech. When the Speech was finally unveiled, after all the build-up and ceremony, it was yet another anti-climax. It outlined a mere 21 Bills—this from a majority Government barely one year into their five-year term of office. They are running out of steam before our eyes.

We could sense the dismay on the Government Benches. The Speech was hastily described as “sparse”, “bland”, “threadbare”, “pretty thin gruel”, “uninspiring”, “managerial” and “vacuous”, and that was the verdict of the Government's own underwhelmed Back Benches. Others were less diplomatic. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), so recently a senior Cabinet Minister, called it “watered down”, blaming a Government who have surrendered to the “helter-skelter” of the EU referendum campaign. Former Tory Cabinet Minister Michael Portillo was even more scathing about the first majority Conservative Government elected since 1992. He told Andrew Neil:

“After 23 years of careful thought about what they would like to do in power, and the answer is nothing.”

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Does the hon. Lady think that the introduction of the national living wage is nothing?

**Ms Eagle:** The introduction of the national living wage is a con, because it is not a living wage. An increase in wages is obviously welcome, but it does not

[Ms Angela Eagle]

apply to those who are under 25. The national living wage describes itself as something that it is not, so we have a healthy degree of scepticism about how useful it will be.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Does the hon. Lady consider as “nothing” fairer funding for our schools, which will affect many Members not only on the Government Benches, but on the Opposition Benches? The Labour party once supported this policy. What is its position now?

**Ms Eagle:** We must look at the policy on schools against what the Institute for Fiscal Studies has called a real-terms cut of 8% in budgets over this Parliament. We have to judge it with that as a background.

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): Does the hon. Lady accept that the volume of legislation is not an indicator of the quality of government, and a little legislation on schools would not go amiss now?

**Ms Eagle:** I certainly agree that quantity is not all. I will come on to some of the detail of those Bills as I make progress with my speech.

Michael Portillo went on to say:

“The Government is in total paralysis, because the only thing that matters to the Government now is the saving of the Prime Minister’s career”—

by—

“winning the referendum.”

In what will be a damning epitaph of this Tory Administration, he said that the majority that the Prime Minister secured last year is “all for nothing”. He said:

“The Government has nothing to do, nothing to say and thinks nothing.”

We have this “nothing” Queen’s Speech before us. We have a few eye-catching announcements designed to distract attention from the emptiness of the Government’s programme. We were presented with the possibility of driverless cars on our roads in four years’ time and even private spaceports, but there is still no sign of a decision on the much more pressing issue of airport capacity for the travel that millions must now undertake.

We were told that there would be a legal right to access digital broadband, but there is no clear route to resolve the scandal of this Government’s total failure to provide adequate digital infrastructure for all. Despite being the fifth largest economy, we still languish at 18th in the world for broadband speed.

Perhaps it is a sign of just how toxic things are in the Conservative party that even this self-described “uninspiring, managerial and vacuous” legislative programme has already caused yet another Tory Back-Bench rebellion.

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

**Ms Eagle:** No.

The Government have already caved in by agreeing to an amendment to the motion which will exempt the NHS from the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. We on the Labour Benches have long

called for the Government to exempt the NHS from trade deals, and we are glad that they have now agreed with us.

It is interesting to see what this divided shower of a Government are now able to agree on. The only things on which they seem to be able to unite are flogging off valuable public assets such as the Land Registry, which actually makes us money, and unleashing the full force of the market in higher education. This rebellion on TTIP follows other Government U-turns and defeats on areas such as: forced academisation; cuts to tax credits for the low paid; cuts to personal independence payments for the disabled; pension tax relief reform; the solar tax; the tampon tax; Sunday trading; watering down the fox hunting ban; closing the wildlife crime unit; scrapping their own criminal courts charge; welcoming some child refugees to this country; and housing. The list does not even include the Chancellor’s latest Budget fiasco, which remains unresolved, and seems to be a £4 billion hole in its arithmetic.

**Lucy Frazer:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. I am surprised that, six minutes into her speech on the subject of education, skills and training, she has failed to mention that the first paragraph of the Queen’s Speech was about life chances. Given that the Queen’s Speech talks about education in prisons, when we know that half of the young people in prison have no education at all, a fairer funding formula for schools and social care, it is clear that it has some real substance.

**Ms Eagle:** I will get on to those points, but this is a debate on the entirety of the Queen’s Speech, and I am entitled to say what I like about any little bit of it. The hon. and learned Lady can make her own speech if she catches the Speaker’s eye, and I will thank her if she lets me make mine. I am here to make the point that I want to make, and I intend to do so.

The emptiness of the current Conservative agenda outlined in the Queen’s Speech is apparent in the public relations hyperbole that accompanied its announcement. Once more, we have to “mind the gap” between rhetoric and reality. Although the Government boast about their credentials as a “one nation Government”, they are cutting support for working people and giving the richest a tax cut. They think £450,000 for a starter home is affordable, and they are doing nothing effective to solve the housing crisis or the problem of soaring rents. They boast of a life chances agenda, as indeed the hon. and learned Lady has just done, but this is what is happening in 2016 in Tory Britain: homelessness is soaring; millions are forced to resort to food banks just to eat; Sure Start centres are closing; the attainment gap is widening between different areas of the country; and millions more are struggling to see their doctor, and cuts to funding mean that that is likely to get worse.

The Prime Minister’s self-proclaimed life chances agenda is either a joke or a con. How do the Tories improve life chances by abolishing student maintenance grants for the poorest, increasing tuition fees and barely mentioning further education colleges in their plans? How do they create opportunity by underfunding education and constantly fiddling with school structures while ignoring low morale, the chronic teacher shortages and the growing pressure on school places? The Government’s proposals for improving life chances must be judged in



the context of their funding settlements for education, as I mentioned earlier. The 16-to-19 age group has seen a real-terms fall of 14% in its funding provision since 2010, and education capital spend has fallen by 34%.

**Bill Wiggin** (North Herefordshire) (Con): I hesitate to interrupt such an enthusiastic and positive speech. The hon. Lady is having a busy day. Perhaps she would be kind enough to rally a little support for the Hereford university project, which will deliver the life chances that I know that she and I can unite in supporting.

**Ms Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman should invite me to come and visit the university. We can go together so that I can see what is going on in Herefordshire.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that there is likely to be an 8% fall in funding per pupil between now and 2020 in the schools sector, after a modest 0.6% rise in funding per pupil in the previous Parliament. It cannot be said that I do not put the figures accurately on the record and give the Government credit where it is due—0.6% for the first five years of the coalition, and minus 8% for the next period. Both adult and part-time education have seen huge falls in numbers participating because people cannot afford to pay.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): One of the things that this Government are trying to do through their new Bills is to introduce new universities, which will give so many more people an opportunity to get the education they need. Students across the country are concerned about the current threat to our universities, with unions going on strike and disrupting teaching and exams. One of my daughters is about to take her finals. Does the hon. Lady agree that such strikes are not acceptable behaviour?

**Ms Eagle:** The first thing to say is that some of the threats are from the so-called new providers, which are untried and untested. We will have to look closely at the detail of the Bill when it is debated, and I am sure we will talk about that aspect.

By the way, I would like to acknowledge the fact that the Minister for Universities and Science has taken the place of the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, who is on his way to Mumbai to help talk to Tata about the crisis facing the steel industry in our country. It is about time. I wish the Secretary of State all the best with the work that he is doing. It is a pleasure to welcome the Minister to the Dispatch Box in his stead.

There is nothing in this Queen's Speech on the growing funding crisis affecting schools. There is no mention of adult up-skilling, which is a particularly difficult omission. Without action in these areas, we will not tackle the critical skills emergency which is holding back our economy. Unfilled vacancies have risen 130% since 2011, with skills shortages accounting for over a third of unfilled vacancies in key industries.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady, not least for once describing me on the Floor of the House as a Eurosceptic martyr. On skills and technical and vocational education, why does she think it has taken a Conservative Government to open a new university technical college in Peterborough—it is

opening in September—whereas in benign economic times we saw under Labour massive increases in youth unemployment and the young people who did not want to go to university left on the sidelines?

**Ms Eagle:** I am glad to see that despite being a Eurosceptic martyr, the hon. Gentleman is still alive and kicking and doing his thing on the Tory Back Benches. It was the Labour Government who started university technical colleges, and I am glad that he will have one in his own area. He is being rather churlish in talking about our record, when we created the university technical college concept.

The Government have a very large target for apprenticeships, but 30% of those starting do not finish the course, and 96% are level 2 or 3 apprenticeships, with very low numbers attaining higher degree level apprenticeships. I understand and recognise that level 2 and 3 are very important to attain, but even more important for the future health and wellbeing of our economy is expanding the higher degree level apprenticeships, and quickly.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My hon. Friend will remember that in the previous Parliament I introduced a private Member's Bill, the Apprenticeships and Skills (Public Procurement Contracts) Bill. Is not a real opportunity being missed? With public procurement and major engineering projects in particular, we ought to be getting more bang for our taxpayers' buck, with proper, decent, high-quality advanced and further level apprenticeships tied into those procurement contracts.

**Ms Eagle:** I could not agree more. I am an admirer of my hon. Friend, especially as I have seen the recent pictures of him abseiling down a very tall building, so my admiration has grown even more. His Bill was an extremely good one. It is important that the Government think much more carefully than they have done to date about how they can tie in the money that they spend on public procurement with skills creation. The Business Secretary will have to do that if he is to deliver a prosperous future for British steel, and he should think about doing it in many more areas. There is a taboo that needs to be broken.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share the concern of those who are worried that the Government's 3 million apprenticeships target will be achieved only if the quality of what is offered in those apprenticeships is diminished?

**Ms Eagle:** I am afraid I do share that worry about the very large quantitative target that the Government have set and, by all accounts, want to pass. When I talk to business, which I do regularly up and down the country, that obsession with quantity rather than quality causes some real worries. I hope the Minister will be able to tell us today that he has ways of dealing with that. I have come across some extremely dubious practice, if I may put it that way, in relation to the term "apprenticeship". I am glad that the Enterprise Act 2016 has closed that loophole. We now need to see pretty effective enforcement or we will carry on seeing misuse and abuse in that area.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP): Does the hon. Lady accept that social clauses within public sector contracts, which have worked very effectively in Northern

[Sammy Wilson]

Ireland and Scotland, could be used much more widely? They do not contradict EU rules so that excuse cannot be used, and they could be a way of ensuring that public money is used to ensure that the country's skills base is increased.

**Ms Eagle:** I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman's comments. It is right that social clauses in procurement contracts have an important role to play. I make one observation, which I have made over my time in Parliament: those involved in public procurement can be very risk-averse. All too often they do not think about the extra things that they can get out of the money that the Government are spending and committing to particular projects, and they often use the excuse of EU procurement rules as a reason for not being creative enough in the way that they pursue procurement.

No one argues with the stated aim in the Higher Education and Research Bill of widening access and participation in higher education. That is what we all want to see. However, the Opposition object strongly to the approach that the Government have taken in both the White Paper and the accompanying Bill. The Business Secretary appears to believe that the solution to widening participation is to inject market forces into the provision of higher education, allowing new untried, untested providers to start up, achieve degree-awarding powers and secure university status, and he wants to force students to pay for it all through higher tuition fees.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a really excellent speech. Does she agree that these reforms to higher education and this deregulation put at risk the excellent reputation of UK higher education institutions internationally—a reputation that helps us to attract so many international students to this country?

**Ms Eagle:** There is, if I may call it this, a “brand issue” with particular suggestions in the White Paper and the Bill. Again, the Opposition will want to study in great detail, and ask a lot of serious questions about, the potential consequences of what the Minister has suggested in the White Paper and the Bill.

There is absolutely no evidence that such competition will lead to higher standards or a better solution for students; indeed, it is likely to entrench privilege and elitism even more in the system. The proposal before us in the Queen's Speech deregulates entry to what the Government clearly now see as a market in higher education. As my hon. Friend said, that is taking a gamble with the UK's international reputation for providing the highest standards of degree education. It also means that any student studying at one of these probationary degree-awarding institutions—whatever they are going to be—will be taking a very personal gamble too. It is unclear what will happen if it all goes wrong or who will pick up the pieces.

After trebling tuition fees to £9,000 a year, the Government now wish to raise them again. They have chosen to remove the cap on tuition fees and to tie the capacity to raise fees to very dubious proxies for what they have called “teaching excellence”. Nobody objects to teaching excellence; it is like motherhood and apple

pie, except that motherhood and apple pie are a lot easier to define. We can see motherhood, fairly obviously, and we can see apple pie—usually we have cut it open to check there are no blackberries in it—but it is a lot harder to know what teaching excellence is.

The Government have chosen various proxies, such as graduates' subsequent employment records, student retention and satisfaction surveys. There are many reasons why people have good or bad subsequent employment records, and many of those have absolutely nothing to do with the teaching excellence of the schools or universities those people attended. For example, some people with disabilities are routinely discriminated against in our labour market, and is difficult for them to have a successful subsequent employment record. That may have absolutely nothing to do with the way they were taught or with the excellence of that teaching.

Likewise, many women have very different subsequent employment records from what they might have had if they had not left work early to have a family. It is also well documented that those from the black and ethnic minority communities are discriminated against in our labour market. When one looks at the figures, it is clear that many people from those communities who have exactly the same qualifications as others are discriminated against and have less successful subsequent employment records. So using subsequent employment as a proxy for teaching excellence already begins to break down.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Has the hon. Lady seen the clear statement from Universities UK saying that it welcomes the plan to maintain the value of fees and that it looks forward to working with the Government to develop the teaching excellence framework?

**Ms Eagle:** I have talked to Universities UK, and it has grave concerns and reservations about the route the Government are taking—for some of the reasons I am outlining now. Of course Universities UK will work with the Government—it has a White Paper in front of it, and there will be a Bill on the Table of the House, which it will want to make the best it can be—but I would not take that kind of endorsement for blanket agreement.

**Sammy Wilson:** Does the hon. Lady also agree that it will be difficult to sell the concept of higher fees for students when many universities have not got to grips with the inflation in salaries at their higher levels? Many students will simply see fees as a means to fund huge wage increases for people at the top of universities.

**Ms Eagle:** Again, the hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about it when he replies to the debate.

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

**Ms Eagle:** I will give way to the hon. and learned Lady for the last time, because I want to get on and finish.

**Lucy Frazer:** The hon. Lady is being very generous with her time. In circumstances where we know that one of the biggest single factors affecting the education of children and young people is the quality of teaching,

does she agree with the principle that it is appropriate to ensure that we have excellence in teaching and that we improve teaching if we can?

**Ms Eagle:** Yes, but I am talking about how we measure excellence and what it means. If the hon. Lady were so concerned about the excellence of teaching, she would be looking at Sure Start and what is happening with early teaching. She would also be looking at the problems we have with teacher recruitment and at a range of other things. Nobody in the House disagrees with the concept of teaching excellence; the question is how one defines and measures it, and that is what I am trying to deal with now.

We have talked about subsequent employment. The other two proxies the Government have chosen are student retention—that is reasonable—and satisfaction surveys. Again, there are reasons why a student is not satisfied with an institution that may have nothing to do with whether it teaches in an excellent way. A lot more work will probably have to be done on these proxies if they are to have any meaning whatever. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say, because the concept is very dubious at the moment.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): Further to the point made by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), many people have given evidence to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee inquiry into the teaching excellence framework. Many of the university vice-chancellors who gave evidence were very clear that they wanted to work with the Government to make sure that they can prove and improve their institutions' teaching excellence, but they need more time to make sure that the metrics that are chosen are the correct ones. Does my hon. Friend agree that that would be a more sensible way forward for the Government?

**Ms Eagle:** I do. The Select Committee report outlines the sector's worry that the reforms are being rushed in keeping with a timetable that does not actually reflect best practice. A lot of vice-chancellors and others in the sector are extremely worried about the implications of that.

**Jesse Norman** (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): The hon. Lady has made an argument about teaching excellence. As someone who taught in university for six years, I can tell her that there was really very little ambiguity in student satisfaction surveys even 15 years ago as to whether someone was doing a decent job of teaching, and there is even less now, given all the other modes of feedback. Even if that was not the case, we would be able to tell what was happening from the aggregate of these surveys, quite irrespective of any particular anecdotes she might be able to tell. There really cannot be much doubt, therefore, that teaching excellence can be evaluated, and it is quite proper that, if it can be, it should properly be included in an evaluation for student fees.

**Ms Eagle:** I am saying not that it cannot be included, but that the proxies the Government have chosen have given cause for concern, and I have tried to explain why. We have to think about how this works through, and I will be interested in what the Minister has to say about that.

**Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** Well, let me finish this point first.

If the Minister is not careful, he could end up with a range of results he does not want. There could be paradoxical disincentives for excellence. People who always find it difficult subsequently to get a job in the labour market may become less attractive as students to certain institutions because of the way these measurements are used. That would be a really backward step for the opportunities and life chances of large numbers of people who are already suffering disadvantage in our society. The hon. Gentleman should at least recognise that that is a possibility with some of these measurements.

**Jesse Norman** *rose*—

**Ms Eagle:** I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and then to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), if she will be a bit patient.

**Jesse Norman:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her kindness. As a consequence of her argument, it would be impossible to assess the teaching at, for example, the Royal National College for the Blind in Hereford, because it teaches disabled people who may suffer in their future life chances, yet no one doubts that that institution can properly evaluate, and indeed it does an excellent job.

**Ms Eagle:** As I understand the White Paper, this also about competition between universities, and there are some paradoxical results there that I would be worried about if I were interested in widening, not narrowing, opportunities. I think the hon. Gentleman ought to accept that.

**Nicola Blackwood:** I am trying to follow the point that the shadow Minister is making. Obviously it is important that the metrics and the process of the teaching excellence framework is right and appropriate, but just as with the research excellence framework, we will go through a process of getting to that point. That is why the White Paper states very clearly that this will be phased in and piloted, and recognises that there will be an important process of consultation and feedback. It is therefore not entirely clear to me why she is expressing the concern that the TEF is going to be imposed with no consultation.

**Ms Eagle:** It is partly about speed. I think that the REF took six years to get into place, and this is all due to be done from a standing start in a couple of years. We have to get it right or there will be consequences that nobody on either side of the House would want to see.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Eagle:** I do not want to get into a Second Reading debate on the Bill—that is probably not wise. I want to get on and finish my speech. I have tried to take a lot of interventions, and it is only fair to those who want to speak in the rest of the debate that I get to the end of my speech.



[Ms Angela Eagle]

Education should not be about shackling a generation with yet more debt but about unleashing their talents to build a brighter future. That is why Labour Members understand that while there is a cost to higher education, we cannot allow market forces to let rip through our world-leading universities. If these changes went ahead, it is likely that by the end of this Parliament fees will have risen to £10,000 a year and poorer students could face bills of up to £55,000 just to study for a normal three-year degree. That is unacceptable. Labour will oppose the lifting of the cap and continue to argue for a fairer settlement for students.

I now turn to the Government's education for all Bill. We all know that this was not the education Bill the Prime Minister wished to include in the Queen's Speech. Just weeks ago, he assured us that it would contain measures to force every school to become an academy against their wishes. Since then, we have witnessed a humiliating climb-down as the Government finally woke up to the fact that their plans were entirely unacceptable to parents, teachers, and the wider public. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) has done a fantastic job in her Front-Bench position in pointing that out to the Government. Labour Members welcome this U-turn, and we will continue to challenge the Government on their fixation with the forced academisation of good or outstanding schools.

We support the principle of moving towards a fairer funding formula, although it is essential that measures are put in place to assist the areas that are set to lose out. However, a new funding formula cannot disguise that fact that, over this Parliament, school budgets face the highest real-terms cut since the 1970s. It seems that the Government's response is not to address the escalating shortage of teachers and school places in their Bill, but to continue down the path of forced academisation. This has nothing to do with improving life chances but shows a Government with a rather dangerous obsession with structures at the expense of standards—a Government who are ideological at the expense of our children's future.

On the Children and Social Work Bill, we will of course support measures to protect and create opportunity for the most vulnerable children in our society. We will look closely at the detail of this Bill and the proposals the Government are putting forward. We need to ensure that when action is taken, it is high quality, has proper oversight, and has the needs of children at its heart. Labour Members are clear that child protection services should never be run for profit. So far, this Government have failed to provide adequate adoption support. Local authorities are being starved of resources, putting further strain on children's services and social workers. Every child deserves a fulfilling upbringing that provides a path into adulthood—on that we all agree—and we have a moral duty to tackle abuse and neglect wherever we see it.

This is a Government who have ground to a shuddering halt just one year after they were elected. They are a Government becalmed by a referendum of their own making, too consumed by their own poisonous infighting to present a compelling vision for our country. The Prime Minister is contradicted by his own junior defence and employment Ministers, and the hon. Member for

Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is taking time off from his “blunder-bus” tour to offer the keys to No. 11 to at least three different people. [Interruption.] I do not know whether the Minister for Universities and Science is one of them; we know of three, but there might be more. No doubt he will tell us whether the hon. Gentleman has approached him when he gets up to speak. This is a Government who resort to PR stunts and gimmicks, and we will call out their behaviour for what it is.

1.26 pm

**The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson):** As the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said, the Secretary of State is not with us today because he is in Mumbai, where we would want him to be, attending the board meeting of Tata and fighting for the interests of the UK steel sector. He would want to be here to champion this Queen's Speech and to expose some of the shortcomings in the arguments we have just heard. I will not dignify the suggestion that the quality of a Queen's Speech can be measured by the number of Bills in it. We are an avowedly deregulatory Government, and we legislate only when it is strictly necessary. Even if it were a reasonable benchmark, it is worth noting that 21 Bills is more than the average of 18 Bills per Session that we have seen over the past decade—but we are not going to go there.

This Queen's Speech puts opportunity and life chances through education at the top of the legislative agenda. It ensures that every child goes to an excellent school and that schools are funded fairly, wherever they are; delivers high-quality, employer-led apprenticeships that provide a clear route to employment for young people. The hon. Member for Wallasey talked about quality, and it is worth noting that all apprenticeships must be paid jobs, with substantial training lasting at least 12 months, that develop transferable skills and lead to full competence in an occupation. A high-quality university place should be put within reach of everyone with the potential to benefit. We have made huge progress since 2010, with 1.4 million more young people attending good or outstanding schools, 2.4 million apprenticeships created, and record application rates to university. This Queen's Speech is the next step in our long-term plan for our economy.

**Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab):** Can the Minister explain, then, why some young people who are going on apprenticeship programmes are not being paid, but are just paid their costs, amounting to about £100 a week? Is that genuine pay, in his view?

**Joseph Johnson:** As I said, we are committed to a high-quality, employer-led apprenticeship programme in which apprenticeships must be paid jobs with substantial training opportunities that will equip people to take on the full responsibilities in that particular occupation.

**David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con):** In Macclesfield we were very fortunate, only last year, to see AstraZeneca, a major employer, take on 30 apprenticeships in some of the most important areas of life sciences in our constituency. Does my hon. Friend agree that this approach, with colleges taking a keen interest in relevant local businesses, is the way to establish more apprenticeships and take this important initiative further forward?



**Joseph Johnson:** Indeed, I certainly agree. Employers are at the heart of the Government's apprenticeship drive and are continuing to drive up quality by designing new apprenticeship standards that provide the skills that young people need. High-quality apprenticeships will be embedded further, with the future establishment of the institute for apprenticeships, and Ofsted will also ensure that providers continue to deliver the high-quality training expected.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Joseph Johnson:** I am going to make some progress.

In her White Paper, "Educational excellence everywhere", my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary sets out this Government's plan to drive up educational standards in England. The Government's goal is to achieve a school system where every school is an academy by 2022, so that excellent teachers have the freedom to give their pupils the best start in life.

My right hon. Friend has made it clear that we have listened and will not take blanket powers to force good schools in strong local authorities to become academies, but we will include provisions to convert schools in the lowest-performing areas and where local authorities are unable to guarantee their continued success. We will consult carefully on how those local authorities will be identified, and Parliament will have further opportunities to debate our proposals. That is the basis of the important proposed legislation that my right hon. Friend will present to Parliament.

**Peter Kyle:** As somebody who has been involved in setting up two academies and who remains chair of governors of one academy, I know full well that academy status can be a powerful tool for school improvement, but it is not the only tool. Interim executive boards, investment in teaching and a new curriculum are all other tools. Why is the Minister so obsessed with one tool at the expense of all the others?

**Joseph Johnson:** I point the hon. Gentleman to the White Paper, which has one chapter on structures, while all the others are on other relevant aspects of what makes for a great school, including teaching, management and governance.

Turning to our universities, in the last Parliament we put in place the essential funding reforms that have set university finances on a stable footing and enabled us to lift student number controls.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): As well as increasing tuition fees, the Government propose to extend them to students of nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects. Given that this is the biggest shake-up in funding for those subjects since 1968, will the Minister give a commitment that those changes will be made in the higher education Bill, so that this House can have a full debate and vote on that specific measure?

**Joseph Johnson:** We are delighted that we are able to put nurse NHS bursaries on the same footing as measures that have enabled a widening of participation in higher education in recent years. It will enable us to address the shortages that have arisen in the nursing profession as a result of the current system. Our funding reforms have

enabled us to lift the number controls that have been affecting the nursing profession. We committed in our manifesto to ensuring the continued success and stability of those reforms. We also committed to ensuring that universities deliver the best possible value for money to students, and we said that we would introduce a new framework of incentives to recognise universities offering the highest quality of teaching. The Higher Education and Research Bill, which was introduced in the Commons last week, will deliver on those and other manifesto commitments.

**James Cartlidge:** Until this month, Suffolk was one of the only counties in the country without an institution that could technically be described as a university. May I, therefore, offer the Minister my profound thanks, and that of my county, for giving permission for the creation of a brand new University of Suffolk? Will he congratulate all those who have worked for it and join me in wishing them well for the future?

**Joseph Johnson:** I happily join my hon. Friend in congratulating the new University of Suffolk. It is terrific that one of four counties in this country that did not have a full university now has one. There are three other counties and we hope to encourage new institutions of similar quality to the University of Suffolk to come to the higher education cold spots that we have inherited.

**Jesse Norman:** In that spirit, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on his great leadership on the new university project in Herefordshire, which is now under way? The aim is not only to transform higher education in my county and to create extraordinary economic potential, but to innovate across the country as a whole by tying together academic and vocational education, and by using resources to create greater employability. That is being done with the support of Warwick University and Olin College in America. Does my hon. Friend share my view that, in order to make that vision happen in cold spots, it is really important not just for central Government to give a lead, as he has done in the White Paper, but for local government grants, central Government guarantees and private money to come together as single whole?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order, I think we will have the Minister. Save your speech for later.

**Joseph Johnson:** We are delighted to support that great new venture—a new model in technology and engineering—in Herefordshire. It addresses several long-standing problems, including skills shortages in engineering. Herefordshire is an HE cold spot. We welcome the venture and its collaboration with world-leading institutions in the United States, such as Olin, and we want to see more such institutions. I applaud my hon. Friends the Members for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman) and for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), who has left the Chamber, for their tireless work in championing the new institution.

England's universities rank among the best in the world. They generate the knowledge, skills and attitudes that fuel our economy and sustain our open society. The world of higher education, however, has changed fundamentally since the last major legislative reforms of 1992 and our system needs to meet new challenges.

[Joseph Johnson]

A rapid interest in jobs requiring higher-level skills has created a worldwide demand for more graduate employees and for greater diversity of higher education provision. Yet this country is still well below the OECD average for university attendance. We send proportionately fewer people to university to study at undergraduate level than our main competitors: first-time entrants in 2013 were just 48% in the UK versus 55% for the OECD average. We also lag behind when it comes to further study: first-time entry rates to masters courses are only 15% versus 20% for the OECD average.

We are also far from meeting our economy's needs for graduate-level skills. Between now and 2022, more than half of job vacancies will be in occupations most likely to employ graduates. We have removed the cap on student numbers, but we need to remove barriers to entry for high-quality new entrants who will help to meet the demand for skilled graduates.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Given that the Minister has outlined the desperate need for skilled graduate employees, why are his Government so reticent to reintroduce the post-study work visa in Scotland?

**Joseph Johnson:** This country has a very successful international education exports sector. We have a global market share of more than 10%, which is holding. Our annual growth in international student numbers is between 3% and 4% a year. We are obviously attentive to the need to remain competitive, but we have a successful international education sector and we want to continue to support it by driving up the quality of the teaching and student experience on offer in all our universities.

**Rebecca Pow:** On the skills gap, the south-west is below the productivity levels. A university would make a really big difference in my constituency of Taunton Deane and in wider Somerset, because it would help skill-up those young people whom I fear we are losing to other places such as Hereford.

**Joseph Johnson:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Universities are a great driver of regional and local economic growth. A recent London School of Economics study demonstrates the strong correlation between opening new universities and significantly increased economic growth. The LSE academics estimate that doubling the number of universities in a region is associated with more than 4% higher future GDP growth per capita.

**Stephen Timms:** It was our understanding that the Government were going to publish a skills White Paper, but that appears to have been downgraded to a skills plan in the documentation related to the Queen's Speech. Has that change been made, and if so, why?

**Joseph Johnson:** The right hon. Gentleman should wait a little bit longer to see the full fruits of the work of the Skills Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), and colleagues in the Department for Education led by the expert panel that is chaired by Lord Sainsbury.

To return to the question of why our higher education system needs to meet new challenges, the system needs to be more innovative to meet the diverse needs of learners of all ages and employers of all sizes. As promised in our manifesto, we will promote more flexible learning with the provision of, for example, two-year degrees and degree apprenticeships. We need the system to deliver better outcomes for those who go through it and for the taxpayers who underwrite it. While employers suffer skills shortages, especially in highly skilled STEM areas, at least 20% of graduates wind up in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating. This graduate labour market mismatch is a waste of their potential and a brake on our economic productivity.

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is also important to use our local enterprise partnerships to invigorate places where those needs exist and work out how we can meet them? My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) has mentioned the new University of Suffolk campus, and West Suffolk College, in my constituency, has just received an £8 million stimulus from our New Anglia local enterprise partnership.

**Joseph Johnson:** We certainly agree with all that. Universities are at the heart of many of the most successful LEPs, and we want their good work to stimulate economic growth and relevant provision of higher education by universities in their local areas. That is why at the heart of the Bill are powers to make it easier for high-quality new universities and challenger institutions to enter the sector and award degrees, to drive up quality and to give applicants more choice about where and how to study.

Some say, "Close the door to new universities. Put the cap back on student numbers. Restrict the benefits of higher education to a narrow elite." The same arguments have been made at every period of university expansion. In the 1820s, University College London and King's were dismissed as "cockney" universities. Today, they are globally renowned. Those arguments were heard when the civic colleges in Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield and Bristol became red-brick universities before the first world war, and when the Conservative Government of John Major took through Parliament the 1992 legislation that created a wave of new universities from the polytechnics.

**Ms Angela Eagle:** Will the Minister give way?

**Joseph Johnson:** In a minute. We need more universities again today. Universities are great engines of social mobility and formidable drivers of regional economic growth. That is why I was so pleased to welcome the announcement of the new University of Suffolk, and it is why I am so supportive of the Hereford plans. Those are just two good examples of the challenger institutions that we have in mind to open up the sector to new, high-quality entrants.

We welcome support for our proposals from sensible figures, such as Lord Mandelson—now chancellor of Manchester Metropolitan, which is one of those institutions that gained university status, thanks to a Conservative Government, in 1992—who have recognised the essential contribution that a wide range of institutions can make to our economic success and to social mobility.

**Ms Eagle:** Thank goodness for that. Just to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman, Labour Members do not object to expanding the university sector. We do have questions, and rightly, about the speed with which that will be done, how probationary status will work and what kind of gamble that will represent. We will go on asking those questions, but the hon. Gentleman should not set up a straw man or woman and accuse us of being against expansion. We are not, but it has to be of high quality.

**Joseph Johnson:** I am delighted that the shadow Secretary of State is supportive of new entrants and new challenger institutions. They are exactly what the sector needs, and I am glad that we have established the important point of principle that the Labour party is supportive of new entrants into the sector and believes in competition. That is a good thing, and I am delighted to hear it.

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** I caution my hon. Friend the Minister not to be so quick to assume that the Opposition will be as supportive as they say they are. We should take a lesson from the experience of the Labour party when it came to introducing competition with free schools. We faced extensive opposition from Labour councils at local level and from vested interests. Although they spoke sweet words about improving quality, they hated the competition that delivered choice to parents and that will, in this case, deliver choice to students.

**Joseph Johnson:** I hope that my hon. Friend will be proved wrong, but I suspect that he may be proved right during proceedings on the Bill, as we discover the Labour party's true colours and the reality of its desire to see competition injected into the sector, which I somewhat doubt.

The former Business Secretary is right. The Higher Education and Research Bill, which we introduced last week, represents an ambitious agenda for social mobility. Some, including Labour Members, said when we reformed student finance in 2011 that participation would fall. In fact, the opposite has happened. We have a progressive student loans system that ensures that finance is no barrier to entry, and it is working. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are going to university at a record rate—up from 13.6% in 2009 to 18.5% in 2015. Labour Members were wrong then and they are wrong now. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are 36% more likely to go to university than they were in 2009. If the hon. Member for Wallasey wants to come in on that point, I will happily take an intervention. No? Okay. We are not complacent. The Prime Minister has set us the rightly challenging goal of doubling the participation rate for the most disadvantaged students by 2020.

**Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab):** Has the Minister seen the figures from the Sutton Trust that show that only 3% of disadvantaged young people go to the most selective third of universities, compared with 21% from the richest neighbourhoods? Is he proud of that record?

**Joseph Johnson:** Yes, indeed. That is why I have just written to the director of fair access, Les Ebdon, giving him all the political cover that he needs to drive further progress in widening participation at the most selective institutions.

We are strengthening the system of access agreements. They will now cover both access and participation, so that students receive the support that they need right the way through their courses, not just at the point of entry. We will give the new director of fair access and participation, who will be part of the new office for students, a greater set of sanctions to help to ensure that universities deliver the agreements they have made with him.

Some students face additional barriers to accessing higher education because their religious beliefs mean they are unable to take on interest-bearing loans. That is why, subject to Parliament, we will be the first Government to introduce an alternative student finance product that will support those students into higher education. That, combined with other measures, will help us to meet our goal of increasing the number of people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds—one third of whom are Muslim—who go to university. We are committed to an increase of 20% in the number of BME students by 2020.

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** The Minister will know that I have been writing to his Department since 2010 about sharia-compliant loans. The thing that is missing for students, who are absolutely put off by the failure to provide this product, is a timetable for making such loans available. He has committed to legislation, but will he now set out a timetable for when, if the legislation is enacted, students in communities such as mine in Walthamstow will be able to access these products?

**Joseph Johnson:** I congratulate the hon. Lady on her contribution to the campaign for this important alternative finance product. The coalition Government were the first to consult on the potential demand for such a product. We have a legislative vehicle with which to introduce it, and we are moving at full speed. The sooner Labour Members let this Bill through the Houses of Parliament, the sooner we will be able to crack on and deliver the alternative finance product that they want to see.

In the reforms we are already making to part-time and postgraduate study, we are sending a clear message to people that it is never too late to learn. The Government are transforming the funding landscape for part-time and postgraduate study. We are, for the first time, introducing maintenance loans for part-time undergraduate students, in addition to the tuition fee loans that were made available in the previous Parliament. We continue to reverse Labour's restriction on studying for a second degree, so that people can get a student loan to take a second part-time degree in a STEM subject. For the first time, we are introducing student finance for postgraduate study, where people from disadvantaged backgrounds are even more under-represented than at undergraduate level. This one nation Conservative Government are giving people the opportunities they need to gain new skills at every stage of their lives.

**Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con):** I welcome the Minister's support for the idea that it is never too late to learn. For some refugees, coming to this country will be their first chance to learn. Will the Minister outline the Government's commitment to



[Mr David Burrowes]

supporting their integration, not least in terms of English language courses, which are a crucial component of their learning?

**Joseph Johnson:** We are committed to supporting refugees as they enter the higher education system, and we will look closely at whether there are any gaps in their support with respect to English language provision.

To turn to the Opposition amendment, we have been able to take steps to widen participation in higher education only because of the difficult decisions we have made as a Government to ensure that our universities are sustainably financed. [Interruption.] They are. Total funding for the sector has increased from £22 billion in 2009-10 to £28 billion in 2014-15, and is forecast to reach £31 billion by 2017-18. The OECD has said that our approach means that we are one of the few countries in the world to have found a sustainable approach to financing a modern system of higher education.

Our economy needs a world-class higher education system, and we cannot allow a situation to arise in which our universities are once again underfunded. The £9,000 tuition fee introduced in 2012 has already fallen in value to £8,500 in real terms. If we leave it unchanged, it will be worth £8,000 by the end of this Parliament. We want to ensure that our universities have the funding they need and that every student receives a high-quality experience during their time in higher education.

I am not the first Minister to note the variability of teaching quality, or indeed the imbalance between teaching and research in our higher education system. Labour Ministers in many Governments have made exactly the same point, but a Conservative Government will actually do something about it. We want to shine a spotlight on good practice, to give applicants more information about the type of teaching and graduate outcomes they can expect, and to raise the status of excellent university teaching. That is why we are implementing our manifesto commitment to introduce a teaching excellence framework to drive up the quality of teaching and spread best practice across our system.

In relation to the Opposition amendment, it is worth noting the irony that it was a Labour Government under Tony Blair who, in 2004, sensibly put in place the new legal powers that have allowed Governments to maintain university fees in line with inflation. For the 2017-18 academic year, I can confirm that the rate of inflation applying to maximum fees for institutions demonstrating high-quality teaching is 2.8%. The measure of inflation we are using is RPIX, as set out in regulations which, again, were introduced by Labour in 2006. The Labour party may have changed its views on that entire era and may no longer support the policy it introduced, but the Conservatives will refuse to allow students' learning to suffer.

As Universities UK and GuildHE have made clear in statements ahead of today's debate, allowing the value of maximum fees permitted by legislation to be maintained in real terms is essential if universities are to continue to be able to deliver high-quality teaching.

**James Cartledge:** My hon. Friend is making a very credible case. Does he agree that if we do not fund better degrees and the growth of higher education through

the current system, the only alternative will be to do so through taxation—or borrowing—levied across the whole populace, including those who do not necessarily benefit from higher education?

**Joseph Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes the point perfectly. It is hard to improve on the way he put it. The alternative to what we are doing would be to place a greater burden on general taxpayers whose lifetime earnings will be lower than those of people who have benefited from a university education. In the case of women, graduates' lifetime earnings will be £250,000 higher than those of non-graduates, and in the case of men, graduates' lifetime earnings will be £100,000 higher than those of non-graduates.

**Jim McMahon:** I was beginning to get a complex, having been trying to grab the Minister's attention for some time. It is interesting that the Minister accepts that there is a need to keep in line with the increasing costs in the university sector, but does not accept that the same is true for further education or for our school system.

**Joseph Johnson:** Our FE budget has been protected at the £4,000 level, and we continue to prioritise apprenticeships. That is one of the most important Government policies, and we are fully committed to achieving our 3 million high-quality apprenticeships over the course of this Parliament.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Joseph Johnson:** I will make a bit of progress, if I may.

Universities UK and GuildHE are clear in their support for our intention to link access to the limited inflationary uplift to an assessment of quality, which is a principle we have long accepted for the funding of research in our universities. It was a Conservative Government who brought in the first research assessment exercise in 1986, and there is no doubt that our rigorous system of only funding excellence has driven up the quality of our research over the past three decades. Let us take a look at the statistics. The UK has recently overtaken the US to rank first among comparable nations for our field-weighted citations impact. With just 0.9% of the world's population and 3.2% of its research and development expenditure, the UK accounts for 16% of the most highly cited articles. Now is the time to extend that principle and link funding to the quality of teaching—as assessed by the teaching excellent framework, not just student numbers—as we have long and successfully done in research.

**Ben Howlett:** There were two very interesting omissions in the speech of the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). There was not one mention of what students want, which is higher quality teaching. The other huge omission was the fact that if teaching quality decreases, the fees of course decrease as well, which gives all universities a massive carrot to improve the quality of their teaching.

**Joseph Johnson:** My hon. Friend is quite right. We are putting in place the reputational and financial incentives to drive and spread best practice throughout this sector, and the teaching excellence framework will be an important part of our doing so.

The inflationary uplift we are allowing to universities that demonstrate high-quality teaching is a £12 billion investment in the skills base of this country over the next decade. It is now for the Opposition to explain how they would make up for such a significant shortfall in university funding. To do so would either mean cutting resources from our universities, risking the sustainability of our world-class sector and leading to the reintroduction of aspiration-limiting student number controls, or the classic Labour response to any policy challenge—*[Interruption]*—we are already hearing it articulated: of more spending, more taxes, more borrowing and more debt. Labour Members might well heed the words of Ed Balls, who recently told *Times Higher Education* that Labour

“clearly didn’t find a sustainable way forward for the financing of higher education”.

He described that failure in the run-up to the last general election as

“a bit of a blot on Labour’s copybook”.

Indeed, it is, and the shame is that they clearly still have not learned the lesson

We are fulfilling our manifesto commitment to ensure the continuing success and stability of our reforms, balancing the interests of taxpayers and students. We have struck the right balance: numbers of disadvantaged students are at record levels; university funding is up; and research funding is protected. This is a one nation Queen’s Speech, from a one nation Government. Through our proposals, we are extending the benefits of a great education to school pupils and students across the country, and we must never let the Labour party put that at risk.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. May I remind the House that, after the SNP spokesperson, there will be eight-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches?

1.58 pm

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in the debate on the Government’s legislative programme for the coming year. Given the subject of this debate, I should, before I begin in earnest, declare that my wife is a primary school teacher in Scotland.

I want to put on the record my welcome for the new Scottish Government team, which was announced by First Minister Nicola Sturgeon last week; particularly new members of the cabinet, Derek Mackay and Fergus Ewing. I also wish to congratulate newly promoted Ministers, Jeane Freeman, Kevin Stewart, Mark McDonald and Shirley-Anne Somerville. I look forward to working with all my friends and colleagues in the interests of the people of Scotland.

It would be remiss of me at this stage not also to pay tribute to colleagues leaving the Scottish Government. Richard Lochhead, who was Scotland’s Rural Affairs Secretary for nine years, stood up for Scottish farming and fishing interests and the food and drink sector in an inspiring way. My constituency counterpart in Airdrie and Shotts, Alex Neil, was Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners’ Rights from 2014,

after driving the infrastructure and health portfolios in his typically imaginative and diligent way. I wish Alex and Richard all the best.

I now turn to the subject of today’s debate. So far, the successive days of debate on the Queen’s Speech have had far more substance than the Government’s programme in itself. It was an utterly vacuous Queen’s Speech, with very little cheer, and even less of relevance to the people of Scotland. The Scottish National party, as the widely acknowledged effective Opposition in this place, put forward an alternative Queen’s Speech—an alternative programme for government and an alternative to austerity. We have proposed 15 Bills that we believe the Government should have considered as part of their programme. They are Bills of substance that would have made a real difference to people up and down these isles who have been hammered by Tory austerity—a political and ideological choice, not an economic necessity.

Although the Bills in the Queen’s Speech on education, skills, training and access to employment—the subject of today’s debate—relate mainly to England or to England and Wales only, they serve to highlight the contrasting approach to these important matters between the SNP Scottish Government, who have independent powers over education, and the Conservative UK Government. The great spectre hanging over the higher education and research Bill is of students facing fees of up to, and now more than, £9,000 a year, while Scottish students access their university education without fees. I am sure that Members will be interested to note that the Chancellor of the Exchequer promised in a letter to a constituent in 2003 that when next in government the Conservative party would “scrap tuition fees altogether”. Oh, what a damascene conversion we have seen! He now wants fees to rise even further.

Following the elections in Scotland it is now clear that the Government’s Tory colleagues up the road are following suit, as they are all about backdoor taxes for students as well. Government Members and their colleagues in Scotland who benefited from free tuition now wish to pull the ladder up behind them. The SNP Government have guaranteed free university tuition in Scotland, and that they will maintain the principle that access to university education must be about the ability to learn, not the ability to pay. It is also worth noting that more of the population in Scotland is educated beyond school than in any other European country, with 46.5% educated at tertiary level, and that a higher percentage of young people in Scotland now leave school for a positive destination than at any time on record.

One area where the UK Government sadly retain control over education in Scotland is non-EU graduates’ right to remain and work in the UK after studying here. The abolition of the post-study work visa for students from outside Europe in 2012 was a regressive step that has reduced our ability to retain world-class talents for highly skilled and much-needed positions. It seems foolish to take the position that it is a good idea for those students to benefit from our world-class universities, but then disallow ourselves from benefiting from their skills and talents once they have finished their education here.

The Smith commission report stated that the Scottish and UK Governments should work together to “explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students graduating from Scottish further and higher education institutions to remain in Scotland and contribute to economic activity for a defined period of time.”

[Neil Gray]

At the time of the Smith commission's discussions, representative organisations, including Universities Scotland and NUS Scotland, sent it a joint letter warning that the removal of the UK-wide post-study work visa in 2012 had resulted in a significant fall in the number of international students coming to Scotland. At a time when it is crucial—as we heard from the Minister for Universities and Science, who has left his place—that we address skills shortages in key areas of industry to improve productivity and economic growth, it is extremely disappointing that this Queen's Speech makes no mention of the reintroduction of the scheme for Scotland.

In 2015 the Post Study Work working group—set up by the Scottish Government to provide a view from the business and tertiary education sectors on the impact of the removal of the post-study work scheme in Scotland and on how such a scheme should operate if reintroduced—concluded:

“Reintroducing a post study work route in Scotland would benefit both Scottish economic growth and business development, as well as enriching the learning experience for all students, by attracting more international students to Scotland.”

In February this year, the Holyrood devolution committee, made up of MSPs from the five political parties represented there, unanimously recommended that the Home Office change its policy on this issue. It is extremely disappointing that the UK Government seem unwilling to listen to the views of a diverse range of political parties and organisations in Scotland. In our alternative Queen's Speech we have proposed a migration Bill, which would include the reintroduction of the post-study work visa. As was highlighted at Prime Minister's questions by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and after Prime Minister questions by my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), who is the family's local MP, the disgraceful treatment of the Brain family shows the desperate need for the reintroduction of the visa.

There is also an urgent need for changes to the Government's approach on access to employment, employment support, training and skills, which have all been run down by this Government's actions and their reckless cuts to public spending. We want an emergency summer Budget, to boost investment in public services, stimulate GDP growth, support wage growth, increase tax receipts, support trade and exports, and boost productivity. For all the Tories' rhetoric about the long-term economic plan, the Queen's Speech contains no indication of how the Government will improve productivity, employment and growth in the long run.

Many Government Members will, I am sure, feel betrayed that there was no mention of the much-vaunted White Paper on health and work, which was supposed to compensate for the savage cuts to the work-related activity group element of the employment and support allowance and to universal credit work allowance. A number of Tory Back Benchers were promised jam tomorrow by their Ministers if they withdrew their opposition to those cuts, on the basis of the White Paper being published this year. Some were right to say, as I and others on the SNP Benches did, that the White Paper should have been published before the cuts were made, because of exactly the scenario that we now see unfolding.

The cuts to ESA WRAG and universal credit have been made, reaping all that social damage, and now the supposed replacement has been scrapped. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions used an appearance at the Work and Pensions Committee on 11 May to announce that he was scrapping the proposed White Paper and taking more time to consider a Green Paper. He said that he had made it clear in his first statement to this House as Secretary of State that he was looking to “push the reset button”. That statement was on 21 March; I asked him directly that day when the White Paper would be published, given that his predecessor, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), had told me at his last appearance at the Dispatch Box that it would be “well before the summer”, and how much money would be committed to it. The new Secretary of State could not answer my questions, so he made a commitment from the Dispatch Box to write to me on the matter. As a follow-up, I wrote to him on 30 March to remind him of that and request a meeting, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford). I am still waiting for a reply, despite repeatedly chasing the matter up. Perhaps one will now be forthcoming.

The UK Government have wasted precious time by not publishing the White Paper. I urge the Secretary of State to come to this House with a date for the publication of the Green Paper. Any success in this matter will ultimately be determined by the Government's willingness to engage with community and voluntary organisations, as well as experts, to help shape any new framework.

The new Secretary of State at the DWP hopes to have changed the tone of the debate, but what we really need is substance. He talks about pushing the reset button; why, then, has he not gone back to the brutal cuts to ESA and universal credit, or to the lack of assistance to women born in the 1950s regarding their repeatedly delayed and mishandled state pension entitlement—an issue that has been commendably spearheaded by the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign—or to the immoral bedroom tax? Why has he not gone back to the much-needed reforms to work capability assessments for those with mental health issues and with long-term conditions, who face the stress of constant unnecessary reassessments, and to the waste of money and time, as well as additional stress to the claimant, because of decisions that should never have been made in the first place that are then overturned at tribunal? Why has he not gone back to the two-child rule, or to the rape clause, or to any of the other decisions taken by his predecessor? Of all those disastrous policy areas, why did he choose to review the White Paper?

We are concerned that valuable time to make progress on disability employment is being lost as a result of that delay, and believe that Ministers should bring forward proposals as soon as possible. The announcement of the Green Paper should be welcome, if it is brought forward with urgency, meaningful engagement with the community and voluntary sector, and with experts to shape the new framework. However, we remain sceptical that the Tories will rise to that challenge, and they cannot be allowed to kick this any further into the long grass. The Minister must formally make a statement of his intentions, and lay out the road map for the development of the new programme with a timeframe. With cuts coming down the line for disabled people, the Tories



must act now. Tory Back Benchers will be interested—as we are—in why the Minister has abandoned the White Paper, and we hope that they will join us in calling for progress on the Green Paper to be introduced with haste.

Forty-nine DWP inquiry reports into the deaths of social security recipients were finally released after a long two-year freedom of information battle. Forty of those reports followed a suicide, and in 10 of those cases the recipient had been sanctioned. Peer reviews do not make a direct link between DWP policy and those sad deaths, but they do highlight the serious problems that are faced by claimants with complex issues, mental health challenges, or learning support needs. I hope that we can now see an end to the unwillingness of Ministers to accept that their policies, however well intended they may think they are, are having serious consequences and could be costing lives. There must be a full, urgent review that includes the impact of current work capability assessments, the punishing sanctions regime, and further cuts to disability support.

The SNP has proposed a social equality Bill to restore work allowances for low-income workers and single parents, to end maternity discrimination, to consider further shared paternity rights for individuals and employers, and to address barriers to employment for disabled people. That would bring matters in line with the principles on which the Scottish Government will found the new Scottish social security agency, by treating people with dignity and respect.

Although the Queen's Speech did not have anything useful to say about those matters, at its tail end we were informed that the Government would hold a referendum on membership of the European Union which, despite the lacklustre campaign so far, will not have come as a revelation to many people. That was followed by the vaguest of sentences, notifying us that

“proposals will be brought forward for a British Bill of Rights.”

Given the vast differences that exist in the Cabinet and on the Government Back Benches about membership of the European Union and the European convention on human rights, with many people losing track of who is an in-out, an out-out, or an out-in, it is difficult to imagine how they could find enough common cause to agree on what such a Bill would contain, and the Queen's Speech gave no further insight into that. For that reason, the Bill of Rights is as likely to be brought before the House this year as it was after being mentioned in last year's Queen's Speech.

The briefing notes for the Queen's Speech on the Bill of Rights added only that:

“These rights would be based on those set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, while also taking into account our common law tradition.”

That suggests that although the Government are sensibly distancing themselves from the Home Secretary's personal views on the ECHR, they have little of substance to say about the purpose or need for such a Bill.

Professor Mark Elliott from the University of Cambridge stated that in the Queen's Speech,

“there is no hint of any developed thinking about how the perceived shortcomings of the HRA ought to be addressed, or of how reform in this area would be reconciled with the UK's remaining a party to the ECHR.”

If the Government are unable to provide detailed answers to those points, they should question whether attempting to appease some of their own Back Benchers is worth more than having sensible legislation. For Scotland, the key concern is that the Government have shown little consideration about how that decision will affect the Scottish Parliament, and the other devolved legislatures of these isles.

Briefing notes for the Queen's Speech addressed that issue—to pardon the pun—only briefly, and stated that:

“Revising the Human Rights Act can only be done by the UK Parliament, but we will consult fully before bringing forward proposals.”

Although it is true that the Scottish Parliament does not have power to alter the Human Rights Act, the Law Society of Scotland has argued:

“Under Devolution Guidance Note 10 (DGN10), when UK legislation will alter the legislative competence of the Scottish Parliament or the Executive Competence of the Scottish Ministers the consent of the Scottish Parliament is needed. Repeal and replacement of the Human Rights Act 1998 would in our view, require the amendment of the Scotland Act 1998 in those respects which would affect the competences of both the Parliament and Scottish Ministers. Any change to the Scotland Act concerning the Human Rights Act 1998 which affects the competence of the Parliament or the Scottish Ministers will in terms of DGN10 require the consent of the Scottish Parliament.”

Therefore, not simply consultation with, but consent from the Scottish Parliament would be needed, and given that a clear majority in the Scottish Parliament do not support such a change, that consent is unlikely to be forthcoming.

President Theodore Roosevelt famously said that

“the credit belongs to the man who...spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly”.

Unfortunately, in this case, I believe that the Prime Minister and the Government have neither succeeded nor dared greatly, but instead have offered a weak and poor programme that will do little to address the needs of the people of these isles.

Although some measures are to be welcomed, such as the likely delivery of a universal service obligation on broadband, this Queen's Speech is yet another missed opportunity from the Government to address the key issues. Instead of offering clear solutions and innovative ideas, I am afraid that in years to come, this Queen's Speech will be remembered as an empty, vacuous and largely irrelevant sideshow from a governing party that is more concerned about patching over internal divisions on EU membership, and jockeying for who will be next Tory leader, than about delivering for the people.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. A large number of Members have withdrawn from the debate, so I will now raise the time limit to eight minutes. We will see how we get on—better up than down.

2.16 pm

**Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** Thank you for that splendid news, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I can only carry on as I normally do.

[*Neil Carmichael*]

I want to talk about the actual Queen's Speech, which is a one nation Queen's Speech because it mentions opportunity for everybody and productivity for our economy. Behind those 21 Bills lies the demand for and interest in having more, fairer opportunities and a better economy that delivers more productivity.

I wish to mention two Bills in particular, including the Children and Social Work Bill. The Education Select Committee has done some work in that field, and I invite the Secretary of State to consider what it will say about social work—I will not let any cats out of the bag now because we have not yet published our conclusions, but they will be of interest to those who wish to consider the issue in more detail as the Bill develops. I am pleased that we will have a care leavers covenant, which is one thing that came out of the Committee's early discussions about children in care who had mental health difficulties, and who felt that they were falling off a cliff edge. The covenant will clearly prevent that from happening.

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the Committee's work on care leavers, it was not just those with mental health problems who felt that they were falling off a cliff? Many care leavers felt that the support that children might ordinarily receive from their own families was suddenly missing when they got to the age of 18.

**Neil Carmichael**: I completely agree, and my hon. Friend was a member of the Education Committee when we did that early work. The whole point is to ensure that those children do not fall over that cliff edge. Children who are looked after by the state are particularly vulnerable to that, and we must do all we can to stop it happening. The Committee also covered regulation in its early inquiries. I will not comment in detail on what that framework should look like, but we agreed that we need an improved regulatory offering for social work.

On the education for all Bill, I first note that "for all" means for absolutely all children. However, there are some unregistered children in unregulated schools, and we need to think about them, too. How will the Secretary of State respond to the thought, expressed not least by Sir Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools, that there are ineffective schools beneath the radar which are not doing a good job? We need to ensure that when we say education for all, we mean all.

The White Paper talks about a school-led system, as it absolutely should. Those of us who support the academies programme welcome its continued growth. Obviously, it is important to be sure that academies feel comfortable once they are out there. The Education Committee will be considering what a good multi-academy trust looks like precisely with that thought in mind. We need to encourage academies to come together to support each other in partnership and co-operation—schools taking the initiative to help other schools. I believe that combination will work to drive up standards, especially in areas—we know there are pockets—where standards are not high enough.

**Tristram Hunt** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman therefore in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains? At the moment, the Government prevent

it from doing so, so we do not know what their overheads are, we do not know how much they are putting into each school, and we do not know what they are spending on the chief executive's salary. Is he in favour of Ofsted inspecting academy chains?

**Neil Carmichael**: The Education Committee was quite forceful on this matter in the previous Parliament and I expect it will comment on it again. I am personally in favour of multi-academy trusts being inspected. The Committee will look into it when it conducts an inquiry and comment on it in due course. I will not pre-judge what that inquiry will say.

It is important to recognise that in some areas—for example, in Yorkshire—some local authorities have not delivered adequate education for young people. It would be helpful if the Department set out data and maps, so Members and others can see where the problems are and calibrate the need for more academies. That would be really useful.

We need an improvement on fairer funding. This is, rightly, implicit in the White Paper. Schools in Gloucestershire need to be confident about fairer funding. I say Gloucestershire because I represent Stroud, but the point applies to a whole range of shire counties and to urban areas, too. Fairer funding is essential. I am pleased that the Education Committee will have the opportunity to check the Department's proposals. That is extremely helpful and we will conduct an inquiry in due course. It is very good of the Secretary of State to enable us to do that, effectively through the timescale she has set out, just as she responded when the White Paper was launched and there was something of a furore over the scale of ambition in relation to academies.

It is in the same vein that I make my next point about co-operation and the opportunity to consider the Bill. It would be really helpful if the education for all Bill is published soon, so that we can have pre-legislative scrutiny. It would be useful to look at the detail behind the definition of a failing local authority, one that is beneath capacity threshold and would be fined or cease to be a provider of schools. That opportunity would help all Members to understand more clearly the direction of travel and perhaps see a way forward. I invite the Secretary of State to consider that proposal. I know the legislative programme is tight and that there are few opportunities for delay, but I think this would be a good contribution to the debate.

I want to end on something I think is very important. I was reading with interest the thoughts of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent and authoritative organisation, on whether we should be in the European Union. It noted that if we left the EU our economy would be smaller by about £15 billion within about two years. These figures are bandied about frequently and understood by many, and the IFS is not the only leading authority to point out that our economy is doing well precisely because we are a part of the European Union. I mention this because the legislative programme set out in the Queen's Speech depends on public expenditure. If we are to deliver an education system that is as ambitious and as successful as the Secretary of State intends it to be then we are going to have to pay for it. It will be harder to pay for it if we kick ourselves in the shins by leaving the European Union and reducing the size of our economy. That would make it harder to meet pledges on public expenditure in future.

**Jo Churchill:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Neil Carmichael:** I therefore suggest it is really important that we remain in the European Union, so that we can deliver our ambitions.

I have just realised that somebody must be trying to intervene, as an hon. Friend has helpfully informed everybody that I am completely deaf in my left ear. I can find that quite useful, certainly in family situations and often in politics, but not when my hon. Friend wants to intervene.

**Jo Churchill:** That must also be the reason why my husband sometimes does not respond when called. He is obviously deaf in one ear too.

It is important that we are a part of the European Union not only for the reasons my hon. Friend outlines, but to ensure that our young people have access to broader educational environments, such as the Erasmus programme.

**Neil Carmichael:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention.

2.27 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): I am very grateful to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I am pleased to follow the Chair of the Education Committee. I agree with much of what he said—on our membership of the EU and on his invitation to the Secretary of State to publish the education for all Bill in time for the Committee to undertake pre-legislative scrutiny. That would be very valuable. It is on the education for all Bill that I want to focus my remarks.

I start by warmly welcoming the abandonment of the pledge of universal academisation by 2022. That is a very welcome U-turn. I am pleased that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) is in his place. He and I had a debate about this on the radio. I made the point that it was clear there was not the support on the Conservative Benches to get the proposed legislation through the House. He is the Secretary of State's Parliamentary Private Secretary and he assured the listeners to the programme that it was all absolutely fine, but I am delighted that the Secretary of State recognised that I was right about this and her PPS was not. I pay tribute to her for at least executing the U-turn with commendable speed and not dragging out the agony over a long period, as we have sometimes seen in the past. I do not think it was ever her idea that we should force all schools to become academies by 2022. I am glad she has dropped it.

It is disappointing that the Bill still has the aim, according to the documentation alongside the Queen's Speech, to move towards a system where all schools are academies. Ministers really should be listening, not least to headteachers on this very important subject. The National Association of Head Teachers said of that declared aim of the Bill that

"it will mean that good and outstanding schools can still be made to convert, regardless of the professional judgement of school leaders, the opposition of parents and the best interests of local communities."

The Government ought to listen to headteachers, parents and local communities, rather than continuing with their view that every school should become an academy, regardless of whether it is in its interest. Academisation

can be a good thing—there are plenty of examples of where it has turned around a school's fortunes—but forced academisation is not.

Ministers have not been able to provide any evidence that academisation necessarily raises standards, because, in reality, it does not. Areas identified by Ofsted as having problems with low educational standards include areas where most of the schools have already become academies. It would be helpful if there were a panacea, such as academisation or some other reorganisation, to overcome the problem of underperforming schools, but there is not; raising standards is a long, tough haul. Ministers are looking for a shortcut, but there is not one. To quote the NAHT again:

"Targeted support is what's needed, rather than forced, top-down reorganisation".

**Tristram Hunt:** My right hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Does not the history of his part of east London, including Tower Hamlets and Newham, show that academisation, in and of itself, is not the answer? What transformed educational prospects in his community was the London Challenge and schools working together and collaborating to raise standards.

**Stephen Timms:** My hon. Friend is right about what happened in east London, where we have seen a remarkable transformation of educational standards over the last 20 years owing to the consistent application of the tools he identifies, including academisation, in some cases, as well as other levers. I am worried that that progress could now be at risk, but I will say a little about that in a moment.

There are costs to academisation, including legal costs. When the Government's policy was one of forced academisation, we had a debate about how much it would cost, and the Secretary of State told the Select Committee that she would let it have the Department's robust estimates of the cost of academisation. I checked this morning but I understand that the information has not been provided yet. I would be grateful if she could make sure that her Department delivers on the commitment she made.

As the Chair of the Select Committee pointed out, the role of multi-academy trusts will be very important. The Sutton Trust has pointed out that, on achievement among disadvantaged pupils, some multi-academy trusts are doing an outstanding job and delivering very high standards but that the majority are not. In fact, its analysis shows that the majority are doing less well than the average across the school system as a whole—they are underperforming—and a big part of the reason is that many have expanded too fast. Everyone in the House will recognise that it is difficult to maintain good standards while managing rapid expansion, and that problem will get a lot worse if, as appears to be the Government's intention, many hundreds and thousands of schools are forced into multi-academy trusts over the next few years.

It is worrying that we are starting to see some of the practices we used to deprecate in poor local education authorities cropping up in some of the multi-academy trusts. Under the reforms of the last 20 years, local education authorities have been transformed. Maintained schools now enjoy a high degree of autonomy, whereas academies are frequently not allowed very much autonomy



[Stephen Timms]

from their multi-academy trust. One primary headteacher told me that he did not want to academise specifically because the multi-academy trust his school would likely join would not allow the degree of autonomy for his school that his local education authority does. We are starting to see some bad old practices creeping into education administration through multi-academy trusts, and the Sutton Trust is absolutely right to point out that the speed of their expansion makes the problem worse.

I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance to the Select Committee that multi-academy trusts should be allowed to expand only when they have a track record of success and improvement at their existing academies. I hope that that will be reflected in the Bill, when it is published, and that she will tell us that that will be the case. When she came before the Committee, she also recognised the importance of parents being able to secure an academy's transfer to a different trust, where the existing trust has demonstrably failed to deliver adequate standards and improvement in a particular academy, as is starting to happen in some instances. If, with the appropriate standards, parents were allowed to do that, it would be an important protection. She fully recognised the value of such a provision in her evidence to the Committee. Will that be in the Bill as well?

Finally, the Bill will also deliver the national school funding formula. The House recently discussed the impact of that on schools in London in a debate initiated by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed). Ministers seem to have given exclusive access to their deliberations on this topic to a group of largely rural authorities, and I am worried that we might end up with an unfair formula as a result. In particular, no London authorities at all were included in that group. I am particularly anxious that the high rate of pupil mobility in some authorities should be included in the formula.

2.36 pm

**Mr Robert Syms** (Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), who as a Minister in the Labour Government was respected by Conservative Members as somebody who listened and engaged.

I support the Gracious Speech. It contains a good programme for the Government and plenty of important, decent Bills that we can support. I will start with the referendum. When I was first elected, I voted for a referendum on the Amsterdam treaty, and was defeated; then I voted for a referendum on the Nice treaty, and was defeated; and then I voted for a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, and was defeated, even though Messrs Blair and Brown had committed to having one. It is refreshing, therefore, to have a Prime Minister with the confidence to put one in his manifesto, win an election, legislate and give the British people a choice. I am 59. I voted in the referendum in 1975. I suspect there are very few people in the Chamber who voted in 1975, and it is right and proper that the British people consent to the future arrangements. I lean towards the leave side, but nevertheless it is a real "shock horror—politician does what he said" moment, so we ought to give the Prime Minister credit.

The education Bill will be a game changer, particularly because of the fair funding formula, which I know London Members are worried about. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who campaigned throughout the last Parliament to get the Government to look at this. It is not that we do not believe people in some urban areas should have more money; it is that when they sometimes have two, three or four times as much money, children in places such as Dorset and Poole are being undervalued by the nation. We need to move in a new direction while being aware that, as with all these things, there clearly are winners and losers and that it cannot be done quickly. Nevertheless, the Bill is a good start.

I am also pleased with the NHS charging Bill, particularly for visitors to the UK. As the Secretary of State for Health often says, we have a national health service, not an international health service. There are occasions when I think we should be more vociferous in pursuing people who use the service who should not. Part of the problem with recouping money from people is that the service is not really set up to do it. We need to think very carefully about how to recoup the £500 million a year that the Bill expects from those using the service who should not do so. We all know that people sometimes come to this country with the express purpose of taking advantage of the NHS. We all know that there are shortages of resources, and that in these tough times it is right and proper for the British Government to stand up for British interests by ensuring that people pay their fair share.

I believe a range of Bills in the Gracious Speech will make life chances better for people in the UK. As mentioned in the House yesterday, children in care are being given a higher priority. John Hemming, who used to be a Member of Parliament, spent a lot of time campaigning for the rights of children in care. Sometimes they get lost and their life chances can be somewhat less than those of others. It is right and proper for these sometimes forgotten children to be looked after and given the best start in life—at least a better start than could be expected in their circumstances.

I have a slight word of criticism. I visited one of my successful local companies, Sunseeker Yachts, which employs nearly 2,000 Dorset people and currently has 40 apprentices. It worked out that the apprenticeship levy would cost the company a quarter of a million pounds, but they have not yet seen how to claim any money back against that. It appears as a dead-weight loss in its forward plan. It is anxious for the Government to explain very soon the procedures and the criteria that will apply so that it can plan for the future. It exports well over 95% of its turnover, and the company is well regarded internationally. In common with many businesses employing apprentices, it is a little worried that the devil in the detail has not yet become known, and it needs more evidence to be able to plan.

I support a whole range of Bills. The modern transport Bill is innovative, and talking about driverless cars is better than having a leaderless Opposition. We have a good programme for the next four years. We will make people's life chances substantially better. The Prime Minister has put forward a one nation progressive programme, which we can all rally around. It will lead to a better situation for our citizens and a Government that we can be proud of.

2.42 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms), although I disagree with him not only about the contents of the Queen's Speech, but about Europe.

While measures to improve the national citizenship scheme, to support donations to charities, to provide the right to broadband and to protect cultural property are welcome and laudable, the measures in the Queen's Speech fail as a whole to address the huge challenges that the country faces. These include the huge problems of underfunding and marketisation caused by the top-down restructuring of the NHS. There is nothing to deal with the chronic shortage of doctors and nurses—never mind the investment in social care that is needed properly to protect and look after older people with the dignity they desire.

On education, there is nothing to address the chronic teacher shortages, the shortage of school places and the need for capital investment to create the 21st-century schools that our constituents need. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said from the Front Bench, this is a Queen's Speech with emptiness at its core. Some measures that are in it are deeply worrying, and I shall concentrate on two specific issues.

First, I have to say I am really disappointed by the higher education Bill. The measures in it could see fees climb even higher, saddling young people who want to go to university with even more debt. Some students are already coming out of university with £40,000 to £50,000 of debt—where will this end?

On the teaching excellence framework, we support a focus on teaching quality. However, if this is simply a framework with parameters already set to enable the removing of the fees cap, it is not something we should support. I say yes to the focus on quality in teaching, providing the metrics are right and the risks of doing so are properly managed, but why is there the link to higher fees? As I said, we need to be very careful about what we are doing because of its impact on the reputation of higher education. We are therefore concerned about the deregulation of the establishment of new universities and the lack of safeguards, which could undermine the excellence of our HE institutions.

I hope that the Minister recognises that this is not because we are against the expansion of higher education. I am very much in support of it and I would like to see more of our young people going to universities. However, we are simply not sure that the Government are going about expansion in the right way. We are not the only ones to have concerns about that. As million+ has said:

“Competition can undoubtedly promote innovation but lowering standards to help new, inexperienced or small, single-degree providers with no interest in being research active, to gain degree awarding powers and university title is not opening the market but lowering the bar”.

It emphasises the huge risk of the marketisation approach, and points out that UK universities trade globally on the basis of a national quality assurance system, high student satisfaction rates and high quality teaching and research. It states:

“The assumption that institutions with UK university title or degree-awarding powers should be allowed to fail and exit the market is potentially at variance with the Government's ambitions to promote UK higher education internationally”.

We share that set of concerns, and Universities UK argued along the same lines in its briefing to Members. We will need to hear a lot more from the Minister when we reach this Bill's Second Reading about what safeguards will be in place.

The Minister said quite a lot today about improving participation in our universities and increasing social mobility. However, a briefing from the Open University has pointed out that the Prime Minister's target to increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university is likely to fail because the number of part-time disadvantaged students entering part-time HE is falling, not increasing. Part-time HE is often the most common way for people from disadvantaged backgrounds or places to enter universities. The Open University also pointed to the lack of clear opportunities for lifelong learning—another issue that the Minister will need to address. I am astounded that there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to tackle the reduction in the number of part-time students, to promote lifelong learning or to promote upskilling and reskilling opportunities for adult learners. What we know is the budget for that has been massively cut by £335 million. One can only hope that the White Paper we are expecting in June or the autumn will address some of these issues.

Moving on, I want to comment briefly on the NHS measures. We know that the Government are ploughing ahead with the seven-day care objective, but I think they are refusing to accept the reality of what is happening in the NHS. Patients are waiting longer and therefore suffering longer. Waits are increasing and it is getting much harder to see a GP. Instead of providing measures to tackle this and the crisis in social care, we get more cuts to older people's services. We also know of record visits to A&E, mainly because of the breakdown of services elsewhere, and £22 billion-worth of efficiency savings are not going to help. Over the last five years, my own local authority of Durham has had to make £43 million-worth of cuts to adult care, and is going to have to make a further £25 million over the next couple of years. I really want to hear from the Government what they are going to do to tackle this crisis in social care.

Lastly, I want to say a brief word about the northern powerhouse, which Ministers and, indeed, some sections of the media talk about as if it were a reality. Mine is one of the constituencies that should be benefiting from it, but I see absolutely no reality. The devolution deal brings with it very little money to promote the economy and skills development in the north-east. It would be great to know what the northern powerhouse is actually delivering, but, at present, I see nothing at all.

2.50 pm

**Chloe Smith** (Norwich North) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods).

I went into politics because I was that bored 16-year-old growing up in rural Norfolk, frustrated by the lack of opportunities and keen to do my bit to make things better. I had loving and supportive parents and encouraging teachers, but little access to people and places. Indeed, it could be said that, at that time, I did not even know what I did not know. However, I am a Conservative today because I believe that it is not where we are coming from that counts, but where we are going. That call can only

[Chloe Smith]

be answered by opportunity: by ensuring that every person has a chance to make of themselves what they want. Conservatives believe fundamentally in people and their freedom, because people are enterprising and can choose their own course best of all, but those people need the opportunity to do so.

As has been argued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, over the past few generations we have seen some incredible and dramatic changes in society. Never before has so much information been at the fingertips of so many, never before have we seen such a decline in social difference, and never before have previously elite preserves such as universities been a realistic option for millions; yet we are not living in a golden age of social mobility. Today, far too many people have their life chances determined before they have even had an opportunity to explore all that life has to offer. So I am proud that it is a Conservative Prime Minister, a guy from a council estate in Pembrokeshire and the capable Ministers who are here today who are proposing action that will span families, the early years, education, treatment and support, opportunity, and an end to discrimination.

We should listen carefully today, so that we hear the hopes and quiet wishes being expressed by mums and dads throughout the country—rich and poor alike—for their children, every minute of every day. We should seek to give all children the chances and the choices that they need to live their lives. That is why I welcome the Bills in the Queen's Speech that promote life chances through better education.

Let me begin with the Higher Education and Research Bill and its further expansion of higher education. The origin of the university in my fine city of Norwich, the University of East Anglia, lies in the great university expansion of the 1960s, and I welcome the Bill's emphasis on making it easier for more high-quality universities to enter the sector and boost choice for students.

Higher education is one of our greatest engines for social mobility, and we should celebrate the record application rates that we are seeing among students from disadvantaged backgrounds; but there is a great deal more to do. In January this year, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission identified the life chances of a poor child growing up in the Norwich City Council area as some of the very worst in the country. That is something that I am determined to confront as a constituency MP, for it is not something to be proud of, but I know that it is something that the Government are determined to confront as well. The provisions to ensure transparency of data provide a key tool. If we do not have data, we will be—in the words of the commission—trying to make progress blindfolded. We need evidence-based policies, and we need the data that will enable us to prioritise our efforts.

The Bill also provides for an access and participation plan. I welcome the broadening of the definition from “access agreements” to “access and participation plan”, which means that universities will be expected to welcome students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and take steps to support them throughout their courses. If we can do all those things, we will achieve the goals that the Government have rightly set out to ensure that more people participate in higher education.

I welcome measures in the Children and Social Work Bill, particularly the mentoring measure. The Bill sensibly requires local authorities to publish a local offer giving information about the support that is available to care leavers, and ensuring that they have access to a personal adviser up to the age of 25. I should add, however, that that must be done well. I recently heard about a personal adviser in my constituency who, it appears, was rarely able to meet his charge, and when he did so—unbelievably—the meeting usually took place at the side of the road or in a pub car park for 10 minutes. That is not what should be happening. The state must do better as a parent and a mentor.

I welcome measures in the Bill providing greater support for those at school, and I also welcome measures in the proposed national citizen service Bill to promote volunteering and social action. There is, of course, more that we can all do. We need to work together in the same way as Universities UK and its social mobility advisory group, which was formed following Green and White Papers. They are rightly bringing together people from the education and social sectors to take a proper look at the systemic issues relating to people's chances and choices. In my constituency, I am doing the same in response to the social mobility index. Educationists and business representatives, local authorities and the voluntary sector are coming together to analyse what we can do locally. Much good work is already taking place, but we want to identify the extra actions that we can take in order to make a difference. We know that the factors involved are complex and deep-rooted, and that we can solve them only if we work together.

The proposed education for all Bill conveys the lesson that we must be willing to look at what works. I support the Government's education reforms, because schools in my constituency must improve if our children are to have the best possible start in life. There is no room for complacency, given the evidence of the index to which I referred earlier. If children in the Norwich City Council area do indeed have some of the poorest life chances in England, the years spent at school must be absolutely crucial.

There is some improvement to be seen in the performance of schools in Norwich and Norfolk, but we must not rest there. I believe that the academy structure can help, I want the Government to focus on building capacity in good trusts and good leaders, and recruiting, retaining and developing good teachers. I also want local leaders in schools to continue to use pupil premium money in the most imaginative and ambitious ways to help the poorer students break out. I think that there is much good work to be seen in the Sutton Trust's toolkit.

I welcome the promise in the Queen's Speech to make school funding fairer. Schools with the same kind of pupils should receive the same kind of funding, and that brings me back to my starting point. Wherever people come from in this country and whatever background they start from, they should expect the same opportunities. Norwich children should have the same chances and choices as children from Newcastle, the New Forest or Nottingham. As I said at the beginning, that is what brought me into politics in rural Norfolk, and it is what inspired many of us into Parliament. It should spur us on afresh today to ensure that the chance of a decent life is universal, available in all communities, in all parts of the country and in every household—regardless of background, but especially for the poorest.



2.58 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): I always think of the first Queen's Speech that you and I attended, Madam Deputy Speaker. That was the last occasion on which I spent any real time with my good friend Robin Cook. I think that most Members in all parts of the House would agree that he was a fine parliamentarian, and I wonder what he would make of this shambles of a Government today. A former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has described the Business Secretary as disappointing, his own Prime Minister as disingenuous, and his own Chancellor as nothing short of a liar, even calling him Pinocchio. Meanwhile, the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the former Mayor of London and the former Defence Secretary are all saying, "Look out, look out, the Turks are coming!", although 10 years ago they were saying, "We want Turkey in Europe."

It is against that background that the most wasteful use of parliamentary time in history went ahead last week. It showed what we are used to in this place: contempt from the leader of this country towards the House of Commons. Worse, however, it showed contempt for our Queen to bring that woman here, in her record-breaking 90th year, to deliver such a piece of rubbish. And even worse than that, it showed contempt for the people who do not just send us here, but pay for the privilege of doing so.

It is that contempt that I want to reflect on now, in relation to something that will have a huge impact on the people in my part of the world. I refer to the ludicrous programme of English devolution. It is a farce, it is a joke, but sadly, it is deadly serious.

The Labour party is and always has been the party of devolution, in Scotland, in Wales, in Northern Ireland and in London, all of which have been given real powers, real democracy and real accountability. Crucially, all those arrangements were agreed through genuine engagement and democratic decision-making involving the people affected. What have we got now? Devolution drawn up on the back of a fag packet; decisions taken behind closed doors by Treasury officials, local government senior officers and leaders of councils; the imposition of elected mayors without asking the local people if they want one, often ignoring the voices of those who have already rejected mayors in their towns and cities; the cobbling together of geographical areas that bear little resemblance to each other; meagre resources being given to areas that have been coerced into signing up—areas where huge sums of money have been taken away from local government as austerity goes on and on; an insistence on getting full agreement on structures even before the legislation has been agreed by this House and the other place; a funding stream that has no basis in fairness or transparency; and locally elected representatives being cajoled into agreeing these poor deals as the only game in town, telling them, "You take this or you get nothing." All this is being cobbled together under the crass PR tags of the "northern powerhouse", the "midlands engine"—and God knows who is in the back of the car in the boot.

The people of England deserve better than this, and more and more people are recognising that, as are more and more politicians of all colours. Indeed, I have sat in amazement over the past few weeks as I have heard people I disagree with almost every day on almost every

issue saying how concerned they are in their part of the world—in East Anglia, the south-west and the west midlands—about how this is going through the House. People are asking, "Why, oh why, is this happening in this way? Why must we in the north-east be told we can't have this kind of authority without having a mayor, yet people in Cornwall can?" Why can we not have a proper consultation and a referendum, as has quite rightly happened everywhere else in the UK?

Why have we not got a fair funding system? I will give the House a great example of the need for one in my part of the world. Tees Valley, in the south of the north-east, has agreed to proceed with a mayoral combined authority, as is its right. The north-eastern part of the north-east has not as yet fully agreed to do the same. One of the sticking points is resources. We are asking why the Tees Valley, an area that is much smaller than ours geographically and with about a quarter of the population, is getting £15 million a year dedicated to its so-called powerhouse while we in the northern part are getting only £30 million. It might just be a coincidence that the Tees Valley contains the constituency home of the Minister responsible for the northern powerhouse. Surely that could not have anything to do with this decision. That would be almost as absurd as to suggest that the arrangements in the greater Manchester area have anything to do with the fact that the Chancellor of the Exchequer lives on the fringes of that area. Surely even Pinocchio would not want us to agree to that.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): I represent one of the constituencies in the Tees Valley, and I want to make it clear that we deserve that £15 million and will spend it wisely. However, we are also deeply opposed to the imposition of an elected mayor.

**Mr Anderson:** I have no doubt that the people of the Tees Valley should have that money; they deserve a lot more, given what they have gone through over the past 30 years. They have been through deindustrialisation in the 1980s and they have taken other hits lately, and £15 million is meagre corn for the people of the Tees Valley. I am in no way having a go at them. I am asking how it can be fair for a population of that size to get that amount when another area with a population four times the size does not get proportionally more.

I am a huge fan of devolution. I really believe that we in the north-east know what will work for us better than the old Etonians do. I also believe that we should be allowed the freedom to decide what is best for our part of the world, but to do that we need sufficient resources to match the responsibilities that are given to us. We need the funds to meet our needs. We need structures that are transparent and fully accountable, and this should not be negotiated by people with vested interests. The leaders of the council are decent honourable people, but they should not be the ones sitting around the table saying, "Yes, this is what we want and we will agree to it without any recourse to the people in the local area."

In Gateshead, the council carried out a consultation of 200,000 people, but only 38 people replied. A poll was carried out in the north-east a couple of weeks ago and, out of a population of almost 2 million, only 511 replied. The majority of those who replied said that they did not really know enough about what was going on to make a valid choice. What on earth does that tell

[Mr Anderson]

us about the way the Government are pushing through this programme, which has nothing to do with real transparency and real democracy? We need genuine buy-in and commitment from the people. Without that, this is going nowhere. We need a range of powers that recognise the vast differences between the needs of people living in, for example, rural Northumberland or the Durham dales and the people living in Tyneside tower blocks. They are different and they will have different demands.

None of these questions has been fully addressed to our satisfaction and, as I said earlier, people in other parts of England are similarly dissatisfied, including those in a number of places that have already signed up to these dodgy deals. I want to make it very clear in relation to my borough of Gateshead, which has refused to sign up to a deal that other people in our part of the world have agreed to, that we are not walking away from this. We want this to work, but we want it to work properly. There is nothing in this Queen's Speech to make me believe that it will do anything to improve the situation we have been landed with.

3.6 pm

**Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), although I am afraid that I cannot agree with his every statement.

I would like to focus on the welcome emphasis on research and innovation in the Gracious Speech. Properly drawn, the Higher Education and Research Bill, the digital economy Bill, the education for all Bill and the modern transport Bill should work together to upgrade the very foundations of our knowledge economy, unlocking a UK robotics revolution, boosting our space sector, laying the infrastructure for our data-hungry economy and, crucially, underpinning all this with a pipeline of core science, technology, engineering and maths—STEM—skills, and investment in research and development.

I am sure Members will be devastated to hear that I cannot go into detail on all those Bills, but I hope they will be overjoyed to hear that the Science and Technology Committee will shortly be publishing its report on space and satellites, including its conclusions on a spaceport, and that we have just begun our inquiry into artificial intelligence and robotics, which will be looking at driverless cars. We will ensure that we report in time to inform the progress of the modern transport Bill.

Whether we are talking about artificial intelligence and robotics, about the space sector or about our digital economy, the scarlet thread running through the evidence that we are receiving is that we have a STEM skills crisis in the UK, especially in digital skills, which needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency. So while I welcome the ambition of the education for all Bill and the infrastructure investment that will flow from the digital economy Bill, I urge the Government to produce their long-overdue digital strategy and to ensure that they not only take into account the findings of the Shadbolt and Wakeham reviews but meet the scale of the skills challenge that we are facing.

I know that the Minister is aware that the Science and Technology Committee has been taking a keen interest in the higher education and research Bill. I am glad to

see that a number of the concerns raised by the community have been taken on board already. In particular, I am glad to see that the timetable for the teaching excellence framework has been amended and that the technical paper has been published alongside it, although, as we have heard, there will be a rigorous debate not only on the timetable but on the quality and metrics measures that will be appropriate to ensure that the TEF delivers what it is intended to deliver.

I also welcome the restatement of the Haldane principle and the Government's intention to enshrine the dual support system into law, but bringing all funding into UK Research and Innovation—UKRI—will require a separation in practice as well as in principle if we are to preserve the excellence-based allocation on which our world-leading system is founded. The quality of leadership, not just at UKRI level but at research council level, will play a key role in delivering this, but we cannot leave the health of our science and innovation system to the whim of personality. We have to ensure that the structures we set in place safeguard the autonomy and the strong voices of our existing research councils while achieving the stated goal of better interdisciplinary working. With a single accounting officer, I fear that this will be challenging.

There has also been concern about merging Innovate UK into UKRI, some of which was based on the fact that Innovate UK's budget is not ring-fenced and some on fears about annexation. Many have welcomed the renaming of Research UK as UKRI as it puts innovation right at the heart of the organisation's agenda and, obviously, innovation funding has been hypotheated. In practice, however, questions still remain. How will Innovate UK retain a clear, separate, business-facing focus and not become research facing? In the new structure, how will we stimulate our innovation sector so that it comes to match our research sector for excellence and efficiency? To achieve that, we need to know where we are going. What is the vision for not only the Higher Education and Research Bill, but this clutch of innovation-driven Bills? How will we ensure that we join them up seamlessly against all the natural impetus of the Whitehall machine?

On higher education, the Government have been clear about their intent that competitiveness and the TEF will raise teaching standards, increase transparency and drive improvements in diversity. Few would argue with those aims. In research and innovation, however, the scale of change does not seem to be matched by the ambition of merging all research councils to improve interdisciplinary working. We can do better than that. Reform on such a scale is disruptive and requires buy-in. To get that buy-in, the Government need to articulate clearly their vision for the future of research and innovation and explain not only why the disruptive changes will be worth it in the end, but how we will safeguard our science and innovation ecosystem—a national treasure—from unintended harm during the process.

I welcome the fact that the proposed office for students will have oversight of the sustainability of HE, but given the effective removal of the structural link between teaching and research—one of our innovation systems' key strengths—I would like to know who will have responsibility for monitoring the health of the whole system as we progress through the reforms. It is possible that that job is envisaged for the Council for Science

and Technology in lieu of the ministerial committee, but I question its capacity to deliver in its current form. Sir Paul Nurse proposed that UKRI form closer links with the Government through a ministerial committee with a Government-wide perspective on research priorities, but the committee was supposed to be about not just horizon-scanning and health-checking, but high-level leadership and accountability for science and innovation across Government. It is not clear how the CST will be able to deliver that function.

The Chancellor has long prioritised science and innovation spending, even in times of austerity, because he recognises that the science and innovation budget is a strategic national investment, not a state subsidy. We now have a major programme of cross-Government reform to match that ambition. I congratulate the Government on recognising that we have no time to lose in backing science and innovation as a key strategic asset and a driver of our national knowledge economy, but we should be under no illusions. The Higher Education and Research Bill alone is the most far-reaching reform since the 1960s, which should not be taken lightly.

In this place, we often mention that the UK punches well above its weight in science and innovation and that we have four of the world's top six universities, and we should be proud of our research base's exceptional impact, but we should never forget the responsibility that that brings. As we contemplate new structures and regulations, it is our responsibility in this Chamber not only to guard jealously the health and vibrancy of our science and technology base as a strategic national asset, but to go further and ensure that our decisions do more than maintain the status quo. The decisions that we make with these innovative, forward-thinking Bills must ensure that we take this extraordinary jewel in our crown and supercharge it, matching infrastructure with skills and excellence with efficiency, and delivering in the process a science and innovation ecosystem that not only drives our economy ever more productively and creatively, but fuels the very discoveries that will unlock the great global challenges of our age.

3.13 pm

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I am grateful for being allowed to speak during this debate on the Queen's Speech. It was a one nation speech, and I will be speaking mainly about my nation, Scotland, and my hopes to improve legislation here. This is a UK Parliament, I am elected as a Member of a UK Parliament, and—for the benefit of Government Members—I come from Scotland.

There are many things to welcome in the Queen's Speech, but many more things could be improved on given our experiences in Scotland. It would appear that the Secretary of State for Education's U-turn is complete and that there should be no forced academisation of schools in England, which is good. However, I have heard it rumoured that cuts to local authority education resource funding might mean that authorities do not have the cash that helps them to improve school services in their areas and that that would lead schools to become academies anyway. No proof has been provided that academisation improves educational attainment—I did not say that; Michael Wilshaw said that. The free schools model came from Sweden, where it has now

been decided that such schools are a political failure. I am glad that we have neither academies nor free schools in Scotland.

Turning to the Higher Education and Research Bill, which is mainly for England, it at least has the laudable aim of improving access to higher education, which should be welcomed across the United Kingdom. However, I find it difficult to believe that widening access can actually happen under a Government that have systematically cut funding to poorer students since 2015 and before. Maintenance grants are being abolished. Disabled students' allowances are being cut. The National Scholarship Programme has been abolished. The educational maintenance allowance, which helps poorer students in both schools and further education, has also been abolished. How can such students possibly move on and access higher education if they are crippled by debt? In England, the number of part-time students has been reduced by 38%, and there are 180,000 fewer mature students in higher education since 2010. As a former further education lecturer, I find that unconscionable. Mature students bring so much to higher and further education, so it is impossible to understand why any Government would want to reduce their chances.

In Scotland, we do not charge fees. We still pay the education maintenance allowance. We actively encourage students to move forward in higher education. We do not simply ask universities to publish information on the types of students from deprived backgrounds who are accessing their services; we have actually legislated that universities must show that they are improving access for our most disadvantaged students. That is an absolute must, and I encourage the Government to look at what Scotland has done. It is important that they not only ask, but tell universities to encourage people from BME backgrounds, disabled people and those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

One reason why many disadvantaged students do not go to university is the cost. In Scotland, we believe that students should access university based on ability, not the ability to pay. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) has had that sentiment carved into a rock in Edinburgh at Heriot-Watt University—my alma mater. It is a subject with which the majority of people in Scotland totally agree.

**Jenny Chapman:** I am listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying, but before she gets too smug, will she promise to go away and read the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission's report on elitism in Scotland?

**Marion Fellows:** I most certainly will, but I remind the hon. Lady that the First Minister, who has been re-elected on a huge mandate, has put education at the heart of her Government and has asked to be judged on her progress.

Many people in England, Wales and Northern Ireland would agree with me that university fees are a huge barrier to higher and further education.

**Rebecca Pow:** I have great respect for the hon. Lady as she has taught within this system. However, it does not seem like a good one nation system, because if my son were to go to university in Scotland, not only would



[Rebecca Pow]

he have to do a four-year course rather than a three-year one, but he would have to pay whereas his Scottish colleagues would all be going for free.

**Marion Fellows:** If Scotland was independent, that would not happen, because we would be members of the European Union. So the answer is: give us our independence.

Although I welcome a lot of what is in the Bill, it is important to say that encouraging mature disadvantaged people to go to university only increases the standing of any country within the UK. Everyone from across the Chamber should agree with that. Education does not just benefit the person who gets it. I stand here as someone who went to university in 1967, at a time when women did not go to university and when women of my background did not get a chance; I had very far-sighted parents who actively encouraged me to make the best of what I could. As a result of that, I have been able to contribute back to Scotland greatly. As I have said, I ended up working in further education. I do not want to name names, but for someone in this Chamber to say that education benefits only those who get it is a total piece of nonsense.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): I totally agree with the hon. Lady that having more and more of our fellow citizens in higher education is good for the whole nation, which is why we are here to promote that. Does she therefore welcome the fact that the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education has increased from 13.6% in 2010 to 18.5% in 2015-16?

**Marion Fellows:** I welcome any increase in access for people from poorer backgrounds, but I do not think accessing education should come at the risk of being in debt for the remainder or quite a long part of someone's adult life.

The National Union of Students in Scotland and in England has said that it is really likely that higher education fees will rise yet again here, and that just underlines my point.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): I listened with great interest to what the hon. Lady has been saying. The points she is making are all well and good, but I wish to ask one simple question: where would the money come from if the fees were taken away?

**Marion Fellows:** Government is about choices. May I suggest that the Government get rid of Trident and plough the money into education? That is a simple choice, and it is the obvious choice for me. It may not be the obvious choice for Conservative Members, but there are other things that can be done. Being in government is about choices and this Government need to look at the choices they are making by increasing the likelihood of higher fees for university students.

Let me discuss another of the Bills in the Queen's Speech—the Children and Social Work Bill. The Chair of the Education Committee has alluded to the fact that our Committee has a report under commission, although it is not yet ready to be published and so I have to be careful about what I say. A former report examined the situation of looked-after children and their mental health

needs, and that was quite an eye-opener for me. Everything I do on the Education Committee tends to be an eye-opener, because a lot of what I do I do not understand until I have gone through the process of writing a report with the Committee, as I am dealing with a totally different situation. In Scotland, we have a system for looked-after children, and all children in fact, called "Getting it right for every child". Our system is very child-focused and is based on an understanding of the wellbeing of the child. It tackles inequality and—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, I realise that I have run out of time, but thank you for allowing me to speak, Madam Deputy Speaker.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I call Kit Malthouse.

3.24 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have to say, however, that prior to your arrival you missed a parade of relatively churlish speeches from Opposition Members, which I found surprising, as the Queen's Speech appears to be a smorgasbord of legislative delights. It is a legislative Milk Tray, filled with hard and soft centres, from which one can take one's pick—perhaps the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) was worried that he would get the coffee cream. In the Speech that he described as "rubbish" I found a huge amount of value, and I wish to take the opportunity today to run through some of the issues that will be important in the months to come.

The Children and Social Work Bill, to which the hon. Lady referred, is possibly the most important Bill in this Session. In his conference speech from October of the year before last—I believe it was then—the Prime Minister electrified the room by painting a fairly bleak picture of the lives of children in care. They are four times more likely to commit suicide, and 70% of all prostitutes in the UK have been through the care system. He told us all then that the care system shamed us all as a nation, and he was quite right. It is therefore a tribute to him and to the Minister for Children and Families that this Bill has appeared. That Minister said at the outset that his mission was to put children in care front and centre of the political debate, and he appears to have achieved that.

The Bill contains many measures that will be vital to those children's lives in the future, but let me mention two in particular. The first is the focus on getting local authorities to realise that they are corporate parents—that these children are their charges and should not necessarily be competing for attention and resources with other issues, be it potholes, refuse or whatever it might be. We would not put our own children second to other requirements in our house, so why would we put children in care second, third or even last on the list in the priorities for a local authority? Defining more clearly for local authorities what their responsibilities are to those children, what their obligations are and the fact that they have to publish those and consult on them locally with people will be vital in creating transparency on the way these children live in all our communities.

The second measure is the concentration on leaving care. It may well be that we are not looking after these children terribly well or that we are looking after them patchily in the care system, but when they leave care our obligation to them does not cease. Providing each of them with an adviser up to the age of 25, improving leaving care services and, in particular, getting local authorities to publish their plans for leaving care and to consult on them, allowing local people to see what is being done in their name to all of our collective children, will be vital to driving standards up.

I would, however, like to see two areas added to the Bill, so I put the Minister on notice here. First, if it is right that children leaving care should have an adviser up to 25, surely it is also right that we look earlier in their lives at how we might be able to influence their outcomes in their adult life. In particular, I am thinking about what happens where educational attainment is extremely low. It strikes me that a sensible thing to do for those children who are underachieving—this is what any parent would do—is to try to look for assistance outside of school. In London, there is this strange phenomenon whereby parents of underperforming children who are entitled to free school meals are still managing to scrape together the money to pay for a tutor. I do not understand why officials in local authorities do not look at children in care as they would their own children and say, “If they are underachieving, we should be providing them with tutors.”

The Government have done lots around designated teachers, and there is more to come in this Bill, and lots around virtual headteachers, but there is no substitute for one-to-one assistance for children in care as they go through education, particularly the early years. Four, five, six and seven are critical ages for setting the foundation for future life. If those children were to get one-to-one tuition, as the most privileged kids—and often non-privileged kids—do in our society, it would make a big difference.

**Rebecca Pow:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. Do you think that your suggestions about the care of children would link very well—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am really sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but now that we are in the second Session of this Parliament, I cannot allow Members to use the word “you” when they mean the hon. Gentleman. If one says “you”, one means the Chair. We were quite easy on that during the first part of this Parliament, but from now on, Members must observe these niceties correctly please. The hon. Lady may finish her intervention.

**Rebecca Pow:** Madam Deputy Speaker, may I say that you make an exceedingly good point? I am suitably reprimanded. The point that I was trying to make is that these suggestions in relation to the care system link very well with our reforms of the prison system. Too often, people in prison have gone through many care systems themselves.

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I will come on to some of those points a little later. Incidentally, Madam Deputy Speaker, “youse” is a term of abuse in Liverpool, so you absolutely should not allow that in the Chamber.

Secondly, private schools have charitable status, and I wonder whether there is more we can do to encourage them to take on children in care. By my maths, if each private school were to take about 20 children, which is not a huge amount in a school of 400 to 600, it would mean that every child in care could go to a private school. Given that those schools benefit from charitable status, they should look a little further than their local community and consider allowing some of our more disadvantaged children to take advantage of the facilities that they provide. I look forward to helping that Bill through its passage, as it will be incredibly valuable.

Let me rattle through some other issues. The initiatives that are proposed on prisons, courts reform, and policing and crime, which allow for greater innovation, will be vital. As a famous Labour politician once said:

“I bear the scars on my back”

from trying to do a moderate amount of innovation in the criminal justice system at Feltham. We attempted to look at youth offending from a different point of view. It was an incredibly difficult and bureaucratic process. In the end, the attempt foundered in a morass of something like 19 organisations that were required to agree and a Ministry of Justice that was broadly reluctant. Getting innovation into the criminal justice system and giving people on the ground the ability to create and design their own solutions to the problems that we face, such as education in prisons, will be absolutely key.

The Digital Economy Bill is incredibly exciting for those of us who have rural constituencies, as it recognises that 25% of all small businesses—that is half a million small businesses—are registered in rural area. Allowing people to have the right to demand a universal service obligation of 10 megabits for their internet is absolutely critical. Twelve per cent. of GDP now comes to the internet in the UK, so, if we are to grow as an economy, it is vital that we connect up all the people.

Many of us have neighbourhood plans in our constituencies. I have several going to referendum this year, and one is going through already. If the Government are to get people to take up their planning policy, it is vital that neighbourhood planning is strengthened and protected. I understand that the neighbourhood planning Bill is designed to do that. In particular, it will allow local authorities greater scope to protect their own five-year housing supply figures, so that developers cannot constantly challenge them, or wear them down by a war of attrition in the courts and with the planning inspectors, to get their way on speculative developments. There will be many Members from rural communities and elsewhere who will be watching that Bill with care.

The modern transport Bill is very exciting. If we are to be at the forefront of developments, we need to grab this technology for ourselves, rather than, as the British normally do, allow the Japanese to miniaturise it and the Americans to consumerise it. We should take some of the things that we have invented and try to exploit them. Although modern transport is largely focused around autonomous cars, I urge Ministers to look at the hydrogen economy. There is absolutely no doubt that the fuel cell is coming. In California, Toyota has already launched the Mirai, the next generation Prius. It is a hydrogen fuel cell car. Powered by hydrogen, the car emits only water. Hydrogen is the most abundant

[Kit Malthouse]

element in the universe and holds out the option of extremely cheap power for all of us, and so using this Bill to accelerate our adoption of that technology is key.

Finally, the better markets Bill holds out enormous promise for consumers, in particular those who want to shift banks. I have one plea: please may we use the Bill to get rid of the requirement to produce utility bills wherever we go? For those of us who pay by direct debit and are paperless, those things are anachronistic, and the foresters of Britain will rejoice at the trees that will not be required to be felled as a result.

3.34 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse). I agreed with much of what he said. It is also good to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson), who made a powerful speech about the current devolution offer from the Government. He is right to raise concerns, but the deal that has been presented must be a stepping stone to the real devolution that the north-east deserves. I hope that Gateshead can find its way back to rejoin the process, as we are much stronger together as a region.

I, along with many Members on both sides of the House, cautiously welcomed the climbdown that appeared to have taken place from the nonsensical idea of forcing all schools down the path of academisation by 2020. It is true that the education for all Bill announced in the Queen's Speech did not include the wholesale forced academisation of our schools through legislation, but the Government continue to state that the Bill is being brought forward

“to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life”—

an aim which every Member in this Chamber shares—but that this will be done by moving

“towards a system where all schools are academies, and all schools are funded fairly.”

Despite there being no evidence that academisation leads to improved performance, we are informed that one of the main “benefits” of the Bill will be to

“convert schools to academies in the worst performing local authorities and those that can no longer viably support their remaining schools, so that a new system led by good and outstanding schools can take their place.”

Given that the education services grant, which funds local authority spending on school improvement services, the management of school buildings and the tackling of non-attendance, was cut by £200 million, or 20%, in 2015-16, and is to be cut by £600 million, or 75%, from 2016-17 to 2019-20, it would be helpful if the Minister could clarify which councils the Government expect will still be able to support their local schools viably in such financial circumstances.

As the National Association of Head Teachers has pointed out, the Bill will mean that

“good and outstanding schools can still be made to convert, regardless of the professional judgement of school leaders, the opposition of parents and the best interests of local communities. Schools have had the chance to convert over many years, and many have considered and rejected this as a way forward.”

Of course, we know that many other schools are already “choosing”—I put that non-modal verb in inverted commas—to go down the path of academisation because they would rather jump before they are pushed. Many will have started down that path following the announcement of forced academisation of all schools at the Budget, and will continue down it because they can see that the Government's professed U-turn and promises of having listened to everyone's concerns are clearly not all that they are cracked up to be.

The education for all Bill also promises to make school funding fairer, with a national funding formula that will ensure that

“schools with the same kinds of pupils get the same funding.”

Can the Minister clarify whether the Government intend to go ahead with the area cost adjustment multiplier to the formula, which would see schools in my region, the north-east, losing out?

As the Director of Schools NorthEast commented:

“Ironically, the Government risks fuelling the North-South divide in education by proposing to fund schools with similar characteristics differently, based on their location. This means that our region will be losing funds to the south, where most high-cost areas are located. The rationale behind this is flawed.”

These concerns are extremely timely, given the findings of an IPPR North report earlier this week that secondary schools in the north of England—or the northern powerhouse, to give us our correct title—are receiving £1,300 per pupil less than schools in London. The situation needs rectifying, and quickly, if the northern powerhouse is ever to become anything more than an empty announcement.

The Children and Social Work Bill seeks to shorten the time it takes for children to be placed in a secure, stable, loving family, as well as placing additional duties on local authorities to ensure that children and young people leaving the care system are provided with support. Again, there is not a Member in the House who would not support those aims.

We have only to look at the Prison Reform Trust report by Lord Laming, which was published this week, to be reminded that too many of our children in care are being let down. The report found that up to half the children in custody in England and Wales have been in the care system at some point. Indeed, 23% of the adult prison population have been in care, which suggests that something has gone badly wrong in our system.

As Barnardo's has highlighted, the Bill is the second piece of legislation to address adoption in as many years, so the Government's rhetoric really must now be translated into action on the ground. However, as Barnardo's also made clear, this is a complex challenge. Three thousand children in the UK are waiting to be adopted, and they are waiting an average of two years, although some wait as long as three and a half years if they are older. I therefore strongly welcome any measures that will genuinely and sustainably help to speed the process up.

For those leaving the care system—about 10,000 young people in England each year—the Government pledge to ensure there is greater support, as well as the right to a personal adviser up to the age of 25. Everybody would welcome both those moves because current service provision simply does not meet demand, and I would argue that that is because one crucial piece of the jigsaw



is missing. The “It’s time” campaign by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has powerfully highlighted that almost two thirds of children and young people entering the care system have experienced abuse and neglect, and they are more likely to have mental health needs. However, we are not properly counting and tracking abused and neglected children, including those in the care system, so we do not know whether they are receiving the correct therapeutic support, at the time they need it, to rebuild their lives.

The findings of the Education Committee’s inquiry into the wellbeing and mental health of looked-after children, which was published last month, were truly stark, and they simply must be addressed if the Government are serious about tackling this issue. The Committee heard incredibly powerful evidence from a 16-year-old woman, who told us she had been waiting for child and adolescent mental health services for more than two and a half years but that she had been unable to access them because she had not been in a stable placement—indeed, she had been moved 13 times during that period. CAMHS are often unwilling to treat a child if they move placement, even if that is within the same local authority area. That is clearly unacceptable and, indeed, counterproductive.

It is no good pledging support to children and young people leaving the care system if they are not provided with the support they need on entering it. That is why the Education Committee rightly recommended that all children should have specialist mental health assessments on entering care and regularly throughout their time in care and that they should receive timely and appropriate advice before they reach crisis point. We need to see that key change if we are to increase the number of successful adoptions and long-term placements and to improve the outcomes for those leaving the care system. That is a fundamental building block in achieving the aims I have set out—it is not an added extra—and I strongly urge the Government to consider including it in their reforms.

3.42 pm

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Education is the building block of our society; it is the foundation of all opportunities. That is why I am delighted the Government are putting at the heart of these proposals the objective of achieving greater social mobility and of ensuring that we have a fine education standard for all.

Delivering on the Conservative party’s manifesto pledge of a new national funding formula is something I am proud of and something that will ensure that all schools in Chippenham get the money they deserve. A fairer funding system is something I have campaigned for for a long time—from well before the election—and I pay tribute to all the members of the fairer funding campaign f40, as well as to the thousands of pupils, parents and teachers in my constituency, and in constituencies up and down the country, who put pressure on the Government to achieve a fairer system early.

For too long, school funding has been extremely unfair towards pupils, particularly in rural areas and market towns. Successive Governments have done generations of children a disservice and, fundamentally, an injustice. The effects have been exacerbated in rural areas, where services are far more expensive to deliver.

The most important aim of the new education Bill is to close the productivity gap between the UK and other countries. The skills plan represents an ambitious reform of technical education to ensure that young people are equipped with the skills they need to succeed. The simple fact is that an under-skilled workforce limits a company’s growth and prospects, and, in turn, the prospects of the country. If our labour supply does not match our jobs market, companies are forced to locate elsewhere, or to close. This threat is real and pertinent in my constituency, and I hear of it week in, week out.

The UK is the 11th-biggest manufacturer in the world, and I was delighted to hear measures in the Queen’s Speech to support the electric car industry. That is a massive opportunity for us that I hope will help Wiltshire businesses. I hope that we can capitalise on it, as can other areas of the country.

Investment in research and development is certainly welcome, but it will be successful only when it is coupled with a further improvement in our education and when we address the skills gap to ensure that we remain competitive in research and development. We must not forget about our severe shortage of engineers. According to the Institution of Engineering and Technology, the country will need almost 2 million extra engineers over the next seven years. This shortage could severely limit our ability to make the most of the Government’s investment.

There are, yes, more teachers with degrees and more pupils studying maths and sciences, but there are still massive shortages. The number of females and those from socially deprived backgrounds in STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—careers remains drastically low. The proportion of women in engineering is just 6%. Something needs to be done to address this, and I hope that the new education Bill will go some way towards that.

We need to improve our career education system. I am delighted by what the Government have already done to join up the link between business and schools. Sheldon School in my constituency, which I visited last week, has just launched an excellent and innovative scheme that focuses on a membership of local businesses that support career education, advice and opportunities for young people, in turn funding their work experience programme. This is the blueprint of what we should be doing up and down the country. I would like to invite the Minister, or the Secretary of State if she has the time, to the opening on 5 July of this programme, which we could utilise elsewhere. It would place an emphasis on local labour market intelligence and inform young people about the local jobs available. Informed education and career choices will ensure that areas such as Wiltshire retain some of its young so that we can reverse the draining away of youth that is happening in constituencies like mine and safeguard our high-tech and engineering hub to ensure that young people have the skill sets to do the jobs available.

It is quite simple, really: to make our economy productive we need to have an education system that is productive. The Minister will know full well that I have regularly campaigned to get design and technology made part of the EBacc. For too long, design and technology and engineering subjects have been misunderstood, stigmatised and stereotyped. If we are to plug the ever-growing skills gap, we need to address this, and the widely

[Michelle Donelan]

acknowledged productivity crisis, head on. We must listen to business and take urgent action. I am confident that the education Bill announced in the Queen's Speech will take some good steps towards addressing our productivity crisis.

**Jo Churchill:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very important that we look to all businesses? I have been approached by bakers and clockmakers in my constituency who find that the apprenticeship scheme needs a little more flexibility in order to cope with small business needs as well as those of the large ones she has mentioned.

**Michelle Donelan:** I am delighted by my hon. Friend's excellent point. We do indeed need to make sure that we are supporting all businesses. Bakers, plumbers, electricians and so on are the backbone of our economy, and very important to constituencies like ours.

The Government are rightly pushing ahead with ensuring that education is rigorous and that students get the key skills and core skills that they need in the workplace. I fully support this, and I would never, ever suggest that it is anything but a robust and clear plan. However, the push towards the EBacc in its current form threatens to undermine the progress being made and does not address the stigma against design and technology and engineering. I hope that the new education Bill will address this. I would like the vastly improved, highly academic, highly scientific design and technology GCSE that we now have to include the option of a science element. There is huge support for this within the business community, who are crying out for change. Let me be clear: this would not represent a U-turn on policy but would be a minor change to strengthen, improve and safeguard the Ebacc. Given the scientific and academic nature of the new design and technology GCSE, which this Government have invested heavily in and done a great deal of work on, there will be no outcry from other vocational subjects, because this is a totally different matter.

There is also a precedent with computer science, which was introduced to the EBacc because of shortages in the field. Yet that does not make a lot of sense when the shortages in design and technology, manufacturing and engineering are far greater than those in the digital industries.

What I am proposing is that design and technology be included as a science-based option, just like computer science, but that there should be an either/or choice so that students can pick between the two. That would ensure that it does not water down the EBacc or its academic rigour; instead, it would enhance it. It would also enhance the status of the excellent route into research, development, design and manufacturing provided by design and technology, as well as highlight that this Government have yet again listened to the business community and acknowledged the needs of our future economy.

**John Pugh (Southport) (LD):** That is an excellent suggestion, but does the hon. Lady agree that there is an overlap between design and technology and IT, and that that might be affected by her proposal?

**Michelle Donelan:** Design and technology is the only subject that puts maths and physics to practical use, and there is no comparable IT-based course for a career in the industry. In fact, design and technology is one of the only subjects that produces a clear pipeline to a career in that sector. We all believe in giving students a choice and the best opportunities for their future.

The simple change I am proposing would be about what businesses, the economy and, if we are honest, students need. It would highlight that the Government understand the need to align our education system more with the economy and give the young the best opportunity in life. If we are to remain at the forefront of global product design, we must take action. I believe that bolstering the design and technology GCSE for inclusion in the EBacc would be an important step towards addressing the skills shortage, safeguarding the future of the subject and supporting skills and British businesses.

As I have said to the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions, the skills shortage is a ticking time bomb. In my constituency, it is one of the key challenges that we face, and I am confident that the measures announced in the Queen's Speech will take some significant steps towards addressing the skills gap and boosting our productivity. I hope that the measures in the proposed Bill will go far enough to tackling this very important issue.

3.52 pm

**Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who made passionate speeches about the importance of our young people.

It is difficult to discuss skills and education and the Queen's Speech, given what is going to happen on 23 June—which is not so much the elephant as the circus in the room—and the effect it will have on the choices we make, but I am going to give it a go. It is remarkable to hear this Government now saying that increasing the life chances of the most disadvantaged is a priority for them. Given the choices they have made over the past five years, that is like a dentist offering someone anaesthetic after he has taken out their wisdom teeth for no reason.

“Life chances” is one of those phrases that we often use but seldom define, but definition and detail matter, as does determination—the determination to do what it takes to ensure that every person from every background has every opportunity to achieve their potential. I want to set out my fears about how, in today's ever-changing world, we are running out of time to acknowledge that that means doing things completely differently.

Everyone in this House is proud of the young people we represent. We see their ability and the factors that make the difference between them realising it and wasting it. I do this job because I think that somewhere in my community is a kid who could cure cancer, if only they had the right opportunities to unlock their talents. Imagine how we would all benefit if that happened. That is where we come in: our job is to make sure that they have those pathways to be the kinds of people they can be and change all our lives.

That is where this Queen's Speech misses the mark. We act as if opportunity is the ladder we have all known and that, to improve life chances for all, we simply need to get more of the next generation to repeat the same steps we took—go to school, go to university and settle into a career. If we are honest, we will admit that it was not that simple or open for us. Most of us can point to the points in our lives when we had a helping hand up that ladder, including good parents, good teachers and good networks. They all opened doors closed to others, by which I mean not just schools and universities, but internships and job interviews, too. The world is changing so quickly that if we are really to change the life chances of today's 15-year-olds, we need to do more than open up the old boys' or old girls' network. We need to see opportunity as less a ladder than a maze, with many different doors, directions and routes to take.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Is it not the case that to give young people opportunity we really need more good and outstanding schools, producing fantastic standards, so that they can go on and fulfil their dreams? That is what we need, and that is what the Government are delivering, is it not?

**Stella Creasy:** If the hon. Gentleman will let me continue, I hope I will convince him to think bigger. When I was involved in the scouts, we always said that the key to understanding youth work was to recognise that although everybody has been a 15-year-old, not everybody has been a 15-year-old in today's world. If we really want to improve the life chances of today's young people, they do not just need our help to get them a job. They do not seek an industry or a profession. They live in a world in which, it is predicted, they will hold seven different careers, two of which are yet to be invented.

Each generation has faced change, but this generation will see it not just in their lifetime, but within a decade. The real challenge to their future prospects is not Romanian immigrants, but robots. Just as Friends Reunited was overtaken by Facebook, so technology is replacing not just manual labour but skilled labour—prescriptions filled, legal forms checked, cars driven and retail services replaced. It is a time of peril and potential: adapt or fall behind. There is little certainty to be had and little time to catch our breath. But the fact that the world moves so quickly means that people can keep learning new skills or reapplying those that they have to the new opportunities that arise. There are more second chances than ever before.

Not only are we failing the next generation by not acting to help them to navigate the world that is to come, but I fear that the measures in the Queen's Speech could reinforce the inequalities that already define life chances for so many. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has demonstrated that graduates from richer family backgrounds earn significantly more than their less wealthy counterparts, even when they take similar degrees from similar universities.

That is not just happening at university. Research by the Institute for Public Policy Research shows that even at good and outstanding schools, there are large attainment gaps between rich and poor students. The OECD states that of all the countries it surveyed, the UK has the biggest gap in literacy and problem-solving skills between

16 to 19-year-olds who are not in education or employment and young employed people. Our failure to teach skills that can be transferred and that are relevant in the modern world means that too many of our young people are struggling not just in their home territory but against their European, Chinese and south American counterparts. That is not because we are members of the European Union, but because of their very British education.

As many of my colleagues have pointed out, we face the biggest skill shortage for 30 years. We have growing inequality and an outdated idea of what would fix these issues. The choices made in this Queen's Speech about what to offer our young people give them little to prepare them for the world to come. At best, those choices will work for only a minority of young people unless they are independently wealthy—beneficiaries of the bank of mum and dad.

The education Bill is a case in point, with its obsession with turning every school into an academy, rather than turning every young person into an achiever. It works against partnership, isolating schools rather than linking them with local businesses and local communities. The Higher Education and Research Bill will put more resource into the "ladders" approach just when young people need more access—to apprenticeships, to further education and to paid internships—to open other doors. The Bill comes at the same time as the area-based review of further education seeks to close down those institutions.

Although the Government's restatement of their commitment to sharia-compliant loans is welcome, if we fail to deal with the inequalities in resource that affect the poorest in our society in the early years, those people will continue to get a worse deal than their more affluent counterparts even if they make it to the same schools and universities.

**Andrew Gwynne:** My hon. Friend makes a compelling case for tackling some of the inequalities in our education system. She will know of the huge benefits that were derived from the London challenge. Does she recognise that that model ought to be replicated outside London, in places such as Greater Manchester? Indeed, a Greater Manchester challenge was created, but one of the first acts of this Government was to scrap it.

**Stella Creasy:** My hon. Friend is right to point out that there are good opportunities to create a change in results to the benefit of young people, but the Government seem to have missed them. The student loan book is bust, and university is not the only door in the maze that our young people can open to unlock their potential. We should be asking the difficult question: why, in a time of tight resources, are young people who make it through their A-levels offered a loan to go to university, but we have nothing to offer those who have a great business start-up idea? When 30% of Britain's young people want to start a business, perhaps wanting to be the Jay-Z or the Jamal Edwards of their time, we ignore their potential—the doors they want to be opened—at our peril. This Government are focusing on the 50% of kids who do the things we see as important, not the 100% of kids who need access to the bank of mum and dad to succeed.



[Stella Creasy]

Money and contacts matter, as does flexibility, but none of these pieces of legislation will fundamentally tackle the inequalities that too many in our country face in accessing such skills and real-life work experience. We need to bring together not just the institutions, but the networks that can help our young people to thrive in the world to come. Ministers may tell me that the answer to the first point is their savings plan in the Queen's Speech and all such proposals. It is certainly true to say, "Save more and you can make more choices about studying", but lifetime ISAs will mean nothing to families who have no savings at all—those who have no spare money in the week, let alone the month.

In 2010, I stood in the Chamber and fought for the child trust fund to be saved. It was a scheme proven to help those from the poorest income backgrounds the most. In 2020, the first of them will mature, giving all 18-year-olds something—perhaps not much, but something. Instead, with the lifetime ISA, such inequalities in wealth will become even more about the difference between having money to spare and having no money at all.

Recent research shows that the bank of mum and dad bails out grown-up children an average of four times, to the value of £6,000, even after they have left home. Indeed, one in three parents have been left cash-strapped after lending money to their children. One in seven parents have had to borrow money themselves to bail out their grown-up children. This Government are reinforcing inequality, wasting potential and failing one generation while locking another into debt to try to help them. If we want to stop lagging behind our counterparts, if we really want to give our children more life chances, if we want to benefit from their potential, we have to learn to compete in the global economy, not to capsize, and that means taking a completely different approach.

Instead of what this Government are doing, we need to bring different services together. We need to link universities, businesses, schools, further education colleges and communities, not segregate them. We need to break down the old divisions between education and working life, and between conventional academic achievement and lifelong employability. We need to move away from teaching functional skills that are outdated almost as soon as they are learned. Instead, our young people need real-world learning experiences and transferable talents, such as complex problem-solving and team-working skills, much as the hon. Member for Chippenham set out. We need fundamentally to rethink how we spend resources and share them, offering loans and support not just to 50% of young people, but to 100% of them. That will end their need to have the bank of mum and dad on their side if they are going to survive the 21st century.

I therefore urge Ministers not to assume that their own life choices should define the life chances we offer all young people, but I fear that plea will fall on deaf ears. That is why this Queen's Speech proves that, under this Government, we will always be a nation playing catch-up with our present, not shaping our own future—getting the public further into debt to keep going, not to get going, and making the bank of mum and dad the only hope to the detriment of too many and to the cost of us all.

4.2 pm

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Addressing issues with the skills base will be key to tackling the productivity gap to ensure we have a long-term successful and sustainable economy. Ensuring our young people are equipped with the skills to succeed in life needs to underpin the entire education system—schools, colleges and universities. Our young people need this, and so do our businesses. We need to ensure that our young people have the skills to contribute to our economy.

It is not our education system alone that can help to improve our young people's life chances. The National Citizen Service is a fantastic programme that, to date, has enabled 200,000 15 to 17-year-olds to benefit from new and different life experiences. During the past couple of years, I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to see at first hand the benefits gained by young people in Cannock Chase from the NCS programme delivered by Coachright. I have joined them in planning their community projects, and we have packed bags for customers in Sainsbury's and filled boxes for the Cannock and District food bank.

The outward bound part of the programme is a great start and a real favourite with the participants. One can see how many of them have overcome a lot of fears. I have not attended that part of the programme yet, but I know the Coachright team are quite keen for me to take part to overcome one of my own fears—a fear of heights. Another blonde Member of this House is well known for experiences on a zip-wire; I only hope that if I find myself on one, I do not get stuck.

At graduation ceremonies I have seen how participants have grown in confidence, learned new leadership and team-building skills, and been truly inspired. I welcome plans to extend the scheme so that more young people from a variety of backgrounds can benefit from that life-changing experience. I also welcome the duty on schools, colleges and local authorities to make young people and their parents aware of the scheme.

**Jo Churchill:** Does my hon. Friend agree that there is huge benefit to our young people from the last part of the programme—the social action part—under which some 6 million hours of volunteering have been invested not only in the young people themselves but in the broader economy? That is of huge benefit in teaching them several valuable life lessons.

**Amanda Milling:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is not just about young people—the local communities really gain. As I said, we were packing bags in the local Sainsbury's to raise money for a local charity. A wide range of community groups and charities benefit from the scheme.

Making sure that young people are aware of the different options and opportunities available, whether qualifications or career paths, is absolutely essential. I am therefore pleased that there is a new requirement on schools to inform students about apprenticeships and other vocational qualifications—after all, university is not the right option for everyone.

We must ensure that those who want to go to university get the best value from their experience, and do not graduate into non-graduate jobs. The lifting of the artificial cap on student numbers means that many

more university places are being made available and record numbers of students are going to university. That is excellent news. However, the number of graduates going into non-graduate jobs is concerning. All too often, we hear students, parents and businesses ask a very worrying question: is a degree really worth it? The Higher Education and Research Bill gives us a blueprint for making what is already a great university sector even better. To date, the higher education sector has been too heavily geared towards academic research. The Bill will sharpen the focus in universities on quality teaching and on getting students into good graduate opportunities.

Alongside the Higher Education and Research Bill, the new teaching excellence framework will put in place incentives designed to drive up the standard of teaching in all universities and provide students with more clarity on where teaching is best and on the benefits that they can expect to gain from their course. That will create more competition, ensuring that all universities raise their game. The link between the TEF and tuition fees is crucial, as it provides a mechanism for ensuring that universities can remain financially sustainable, but only if they continue to drive up the quality of their teaching.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee looked carefully at the plans for the TEF earlier this year in our inquiry into teaching quality in higher education. Our report recognised the role that the TEF could play in ensuring that universities meet student expectations and improve on their leading international position. However, we urged the Government not to rush the TEF's introduction, so I am pleased that the White Paper confirmed that 2017-18 will be a trial year. I am sure that the sector will welcome the opportunity to have further input into the TEF technical consultation that the Department has launched.

Our report also called on the sector to work with the Government to help develop the TEF. I hope it does so, because it is important for the sector's future, its financial sustainability and the employment and career opportunities of our graduates, as well as for our economy. We will scrutinise the details of the Higher Education and Research Bill in the coming weeks, but it is increasingly clear—not least from their amendment—that the Opposition do not have a credible plan for higher education other than to threaten the financial sustainability of our world-class higher education sector.

Addressing the skills of our young people will be key to helping us solve the productivity puzzle. That is why I welcome the many measures set out in the Queen's Speech that are designed to ensure our young people have the skills to get on in life.

4.9 pm

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling), and I enjoyed picturing her as a blonde on a wire. I am sure she will not get stuck, and I admire the gusto with which she undertakes her role as a constituency MP. However, she did make me reflect on the introduction of the National Citizen Service, alongside the demise of our youth service. I wish the NCS well, but I regret that my local community no longer has a targeted, effective resource to deal with real and immediate problems, not just for young people, but for the wider community.

It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), although I wish we had conferred a little earlier because I found myself scratching out large segments of my speech. She did a great job of explaining why the credibility of the life chances strategy will be questionable when it emerges, given the Government's record.

I find myself pondering the term "life chances". It is a much better term than "social mobility", which is not particularly widely understood. I looked it up, and found that "life chances" was initially coined by Max Weber, the famous sociologist, and it is a positive thing that the Tories are taking reference from his work. My concern, however, is that the term "life chances" will become rubbished because the Government will mess things up, and will not deliver any meaningful improvement in life chances to most people in the country. The term could well go the way of "localism", "the big society" and—increasingly in my part of the country—"the northern powerhouse". That term is treated with utter derision and contempt, and I would hate that to happen to "life chances". I am no one's class warrior, but I am Labour, and we are about life chances and widening equality of opportunity. That is what we are here for—all Labour Members are in the Labour party because they are interested in life chances. *[Interruption.]* I am happy to take an intervention if someone wishes to make one.

It is difficult to see how the Government intend to proceed with improving life chances. They are still paying for a social mobility and child poverty commission, which writes excellent, first-class reports and commissions superb research, yet there is precious little sight of that in any Government policies. The commission makes specific recommendations that relate directly to the issues under consideration, but the Government ignore them.

We have heard from many Members who are worried about the quality of apprenticeships—I know I am, and I have seen extremely questionable examples of short, poor-quality apprenticeships that do not lead anywhere. According to the commission, we should have a target of around 30,000 higher level, level 3 apprenticeships. Life chances differ depending on what someone does when they are 16. The decisions they make then determine their life chances for the rest of their life. If they take a non-academic route, their chances of doing well later in life are greatly diminished.

**Andrew Gwynne:** My hon. Friend reminds me of the Aimhigher scheme that operated in my constituency in 2010. It was all about encouraging young people from deprived backgrounds to think that higher education was something for them—basically, it did the things that my mum and dad did to encourage me to go into higher education. Is it not a travesty for those young people that one of this Government's first actions was to scrap Aimhigher?

**Jenny Chapman:** It is. Our universities do not do nearly enough to encourage a broader range of people to attend their institutions. There are little schemes—I am sure there are some lovely pockets of good practice around the country; I have seen some gorgeous things with primary school children wearing hats around local universities—but their long-term impact is very weak.

[*Jenny Chapman*]

We find that the life chances of non-graduates, the people who do not go on to university, are limited. Some 42% do okay: they find themselves in the top half of occupations, are relatively well paid, and receive further training and progression throughout their careers. However, men in lower-half occupations are low paid, with no progression. They make up 16% of non-graduates. They are mostly younger men and they work in lower-paying occupations. There are then the skilled but stuck. Generally, they are women in part-time work. They, too, make up 16% of non-graduates. They are mostly mothers working in low-paying occupations, such as sales and customer service, because they are unable to retrain, get childcare or part-time work in occupations for which they may well be qualified.

About 26% of non-graduates are young, tend to have children and have low qualifications. Again, they are mainly women. They are at real risk of getting stuck. They may have messed up and not done so well in their GCSEs. Perhaps they did not get any advice on what was best for them and made a poor choice. They may have ended up doing hairdressing, beauty therapy or going into another low-paid profession because their friends were doing it and the alternatives were not explained to them. It is now almost impossible for them to get out of that profession and into something with a real chance of progression. If we are talking about life chances, it is this stage in education—if I could fix one thing—that really needs to be addressed. It is underfunded and ignored. There is no decent advice for young people before they make these decisions.

One recommendation from the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission is for a common access point. For young people going to university there is the UCAS system. They make their application and are supported through the process. There are deadlines and they understand the process. There is a whole host of information about the outcomes, routes and destinations available on the internet. There is nothing like that for those trying to get on a further education course and that needs to be addressed.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an extremely interesting and apposite speech. As the father of five children who have gone through the age of 16, your point—sorry, the hon. Lady's point; forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, I deserve to be hanged—about the age of 16 being a crucial time for decision making is so very important. I just want to reinforce that point, having watched five children go through the age of 16. It is so incredibly important. People should recognise that 16 is the golden age.

**Jenny Chapman:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is great to have support across the House on this point.

On GCSE and A-level results days we send out tweets congratulating young people, schools and parents. In our constituencies and nationally, there is a sense of an event. There is nothing like that attention, celebration or recognition for non-academic, post-16 qualifications. We do not have the same sense of a nation coming together to recognise the achievement of our young people when they receive their NVQ level 3 in whatever it might be.

Such an inequality of status in qualifications at that age is wrong and something we need to address if we are serious about promoting non-graduate routes into the professions. Let us be honest: most of us will be encouraging our children to take a certain route, involving A-levels and university, because we know that that is how a person gets the best chances. Until non-graduate or non-academic qualifications post-16 bring with them the same opportunities, life chances, employment opportunities and pay, life chances will remain desperately unequal and how well someone succeeds will have nothing to do with what they know but will depend on who they know, who advises them and—even worse—who their parents know. We will not have equality of life chances until we address that simple issue.

4.20 pm

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the considered tone of the hon. Member for Darlington (*Jenny Chapman*), whose speeches I always greatly enjoy.

Every year since I was elected in 2010, I have been overwhelmed by the pageantry associated with the Queen's Speech, particularly the horses and the evocative sights and sounds that accompany the occasion. For a variety of reasons, however, I have never been able to speak in the Queen's Speech debate, so I am pleased to do so today.

I welcome the legislative programme, especially the focus on life chances, which has featured so much in today's debate. The focus on the life chances of the most disadvantaged is widely welcomed across the House. In some ways, it is becoming a competition to see which party can be the most progressive, which is a terrific way to proceed. I particularly welcome the proposed Bill on prison reform. Clearly, time in prison is designed to punish, but just as important is rehabilitation, as we are acknowledging more today than ever before, so that Bill will be hugely important.

The theme of today's debate is education, skills and training, but because those policy areas are devolved in my constituency, they are not matters on which I want to contribute directly. It is logical, however, that I speak about the Wales Bill, which will cover education in Wales. The House might have observed the growing tradition of having a Wales Bill in every Queen's Speech—pretty much every Queen's Speech has had a Wales Bill since I have been here. We do not know what will be in the Wales Bill, but we have a fair idea, because the last Parliament considered a draft Wales Bill in great detail. We can hazard a pretty good guess, therefore, about what will be in this one.

We expect to see the Bill fairly soon—the rumour is that it will be finished before the summer—and that its aim will be to deliver a stronger, more stable and financially accountable devolved settlement in Wales. The journey towards the institution of government in Wales began many decades ago, but the first major step was the 1997 referendum on whether to establish it. I did not support the idea of a Welsh Assembly in 1997—I campaigned against it—mainly because I thought we were being sold a pup: an unstable and illogical institution that, as it stood, was doomed to failure. But Wales voted yes by the narrowest of margins.



I was driving home from the count in the early hours of the morning on 19 September 1997 and I did what Conservatives tend to do; I came to terms with the new situation—something that some of us might find ourselves doing on 24 June. It was decided that there would be a Welsh Assembly elected by the additional member proportional representation system, which virtually guaranteed a Labour or Labour-led Administration. I committed to the Assembly and became a Member. I was a Member for eight years and probably would still be, had it not been for how the PR system works. I sometimes look on serving as an MP as compensation for losing my position in the Welsh Assembly.

I look forward to participating in the debate on the Wales Bill, and I know there will be many differing opinions, including within my own party. Fundamentally, my position on what change is necessary is that we need devolution of responsibility for income tax. That is the main reason why I want to speak in today's debate. I believe it to be crucial to a stable Welsh Government.

When I first began raising this viewpoint, perhaps two or three years ago, I recall gaining very little support for it and I felt quite isolated, but that is not the case today. My view is informed by my experience as a Conservative spokesman for finance in the National Assembly for Wales. Every year we went through what we referred to as a “budget process”. It was not really that, however; it was a spending plan. A budget needs consideration on both sides of the ledger—how to raise money and how to spend it. That is where I want the devolutionary process to move so that we can reach that position.

One proposal in the Wales Bill will be to rename the National Assembly as a Parliament—“the Welsh Parliament”. I agree with that and I am supportive of it, but it cannot be called a genuine Parliament if it does not have responsibility for raising part of the money it pays in spending. We have just had a Welsh general election, in which parties other than the Conservative party were basing their campaigns on attacking the Conservative Government at Westminster for not providing enough money for what they wanted to do. That is fine, but it is not what a Welsh general election should be based on. Both sides of the ledger need to be available.

My personal view—quite a strong opinion that I have expressed before—is that unless the Wales Bill includes granting the Assembly the responsibility for levying income tax, and a significant amount of it proportionally, the Bill will deserve to fail. Without financial accountability for the Welsh Government, not one iota more of power should be transferred to the Welsh Parliament. That is absolutely my view.

There will be other red lines when the Wales Bill comes before us. I hope that all parties will come together—this will be necessary—to consider positively how to take the Bill forward. We know that significant changes will be made to the draft Bill, and that the number of powers reserved to Westminster will be far fewer than we were expecting on the basis of the draft Bill. The necessity tests that were in the draft Bill and caused a great deal of concern, particularly on the part of the Welsh Government, are now gone. There are two changes, but there will be other disputed areas where we will need good will to come up with an answer.

The establishment of a Welsh jurisdiction is one area. Over the last three or four years, a body of Welsh law has been developed. Do we need a separate Welsh jurisdiction to deal with it? I think not, but all parties will have to come together to decide how to take that forward in the Bill. What of policing? Should it, along with other emergency services, be devolved? There will be a big dispute about that, so we will have to come together to think about how to deal with it. The same applies to broadcasting. Many people think broadcasting should be devolved, but equally, many people do not.

Delivering a new Wales Bill will not be easy. It is going to be a big challenge for a new Secretary of State for Wales. It is going to need Members of all parties to look positively about how to reach a new agreed position. This will mean working positively here in Westminster and indeed in Cardiff Bay if we are to deliver the stable government in Wales that we all want.

4.28 pm

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): I apologise for missing the Minister's opening peroration. I am sure it was very impressive and persuasive.

Politicians are, generally speaking, good talkers but poor listeners. However, I and many others listen carefully to the Queen's Speech. I also try to listen to the Minister for Schools, the Secretary of State for Education and the Department. Indeed, I listened carefully to their avowed policy aims: excellence, opportunity, development and employability—and I applaud them. It is the explanation of their methods, their solutions and their prescriptions that I have a problem with: the restructuring, the tinkering and the arbitrary diktats. Frankly, that is what most people have a problem with when it comes to this Government's particular policies, but I still try to listen carefully to the arguments even for this. I have picked out three features of their standard arguments that trouble me—what I would call three persistent fallacies, or three repeated mantras—which I shall briefly sketch. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond, because I mean this to be a helpful critique.

First, I do not know whether the Minister is familiar with the great Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, but he drew a distinction between good and bad theories. Good theories are testable and, in principle, falsifiable, while bad theories can never be tested, and are never falsifiable. Mindful of that, I have listened when the Minister has cited learned or professional opinion in support of Government policy, and I have heard good evidence and good support; but I have also listened when the Minister has declared that the total absence of any learned or professional backing for some policies is sure evidence that the Government are doing something challenging, difficult, important and, of course, right. Either way, the Government are correct, and the policy is simply unfalsifiable.

The second fallacy follows on from that. When Government policy prompts howls of protest from professionals and teachers—as it often does—that tends to suggest to the Government that the provider interest is being challenged in the interest of the pupils. Recently, they have talked darkly of “vested interests”. That assumes, erroneously, that it is, or could be, in the interests of teachers not to deliver lessons that are relevant, appropriate and interesting to pupils, and

[John Pugh]

aligned with pupils' development and capabilities. Well, just try doing that—not delivering good lessons—if you are a teacher. Teachers who try not to do it, in any educational context, generally crash and burn. The conflict of interests is simply an illusion.

The third fallacy to which I wish to draw the Minister's attention is the tendency to announce a policy with a laudable objective, which is designed to solve a problem but which is of doubtful efficacy, and then to suggest that rather than its being subjected to proper assessment, it is necessary to press on with it immediately and imperatively. That was the language that surrounded the "coasting schools" debate. No day could be lost, it was said, or the pupil would suffer irrecoverably and would never catch up. Unevidenced policy must be applied forthwith. We can imagine how much harm would be done if the same policy were applied in medical circles.

I have invented none of that. Those are the standard arguments that I have heard put by a beleaguered Department from the Government Front Bench—and I do, genuinely, try to listen.

Let us forget the dogma and the prejudice behind the policy for a moment, and look only at the logic. The logic of the Government's position is quite troubling. Dark talk about specific vested interests—I do not know whether that refers to the unions, the teachers, the parents or the academics—or talk of what used to be known as "The Blob" smacks of paranoia rather than rationality and critical thinking, of which the Government are supposedly in favour. Always seeing critics as enemies is the mark of a zealot, not a feature of sane, leisured policy making. Let me impress on the Government that I am in favour of sane, leisured policy making, and of buying in from as many stakeholders as possible.

4.33 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), although I cannot say that I agreed with all his analytical comments about logic.

Unlike many Opposition Members, I find much to recommend in the Queen's Speech, given the cornucopia of Bills that it contains and all the opportunities that they will engender. I am delighted to see that education is at the heart of the Speech. As many Members have said, we owe it to our children to give them the very best education that we possibly can, and the Government are transforming education by extending the principles of freedom and accountability, particularly in the Higher Education and Research Bill. One of the key roles of higher education is, of course, to equip our young people with the tools that they need to enter the working world, thus benefiting businesses and enabling those young people to earn a good living—and, even better, a fulfilling living.

In Taunton Deane we have a number of excellent higher education institutions, including Richard Huish College, which is among the top 10 sixth-form colleges in the country, and Somerset College. Despite their excellent contributions, however, it is clear from my many discussions with businesses and with students themselves that there is something of a skills gap in

Taunton Deane. The same point has been raised by many other Members, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan). Too often, we are losing the brightest and best of our students. They are going elsewhere, despite Taunton Deane being a lovely place to live. This is affecting the productivity of the area, which is slightly below the average for the country, and we need to address that. How are we going to do this? The idea is to get a university, to retain our young people and even to draw others in from elsewhere.

So I welcome the provisions in the higher education and research Bill to aid the establishment of new universities, to provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds. A university education is one of the best ways of improving the life chances of young people. I was delighted to raise this with the Prime Minister last week on the opening day of debates on the Queen's Speech, and to get a resoundingly positive response from him. Hon. Members will have guessed that I have just the place for a university. It is of course the county town of Taunton. I am not just making this up; many discussions have already taken place with the various stakeholders.

The essential thing will be to ensure that a university provides the courses that will give the students the skills that are required. I suggest that it could focus on such subjects as health training and community health, given that we have the excellent Musgrove Park Hospital just down the road. The local college is already running some courses of that kind. Similarly, there could be an emphasis on nuclear or low-carbon energy, as we have Hinkley Point just over the way. A university could also build on our aeronautical strengths, given that we have a number of such businesses in the area. It is early days, but I am optimistic that we might be able to move this forward under this exciting new Bill.

While I am on the subject of universities, I must add that I support the Bill's endeavours to make universities and, particularly, lecturers more accountable for what they deliver. I declare an interest: I have two daughters who have been through the university system, and the amount of input they got from their lecturers was often a subject for discussion around our dinner table. I shall not name any names, but they told me that they were sometimes getting as few as one or two lectures a week, even though they were paying hard-earned money for their courses—or they will be later, when they start paying it back. I therefore absolutely support that measure. We must ensure that our universities are delivering what our students need and that that is aligned to what business requires.

I shall turn now to the proposals on the education of younger children in the education for all Bill. Last week, I had a lovely visit to North Town Primary School, a beating heart in the centre of Taunton. It is surrounded by houses, but it was a lovely visit not least because the school has an excellent garden. I shall digress slightly here but I want to say that children can learn a great deal by being taught about gardening. It is good for their mental health and for health education, and they can learn about pollinators and about where their food comes from. I urge the Minister to tweak the arrangements so that we can get this into schools' curriculums if we can.

Praise must go to the hard-working headteacher of the school, who is leading by example, and he has a team of very enthusiastic teachers. Fairer funding for

schools was at the top of his agenda when he spoke to me. Many other Members have mentioned that today, and I am delighted that this Government are going to move the fairer funding issue forward. Our students in Taunton receive £2,000 less per pupil than those in the best-funded schools, which is clearly ridiculous. Our schools are doing a grand job, but just think how much better they could do if we sorted the system out. I applaud the fact that the Government are going to do that.

I want briefly to mention academisation. Madam Deputy Speaker, did you know that that word is not in the dictionary? It is not a real word, yet we are talking about education. Perhaps it will get into the dictionary now that we have mentioned it so often. Academisation really is the way forward. North Town is a primary academy and it is working really well. The staff are very pleased with their ability to take charge of their own budget and to drive their own ideas forward. Almost all the schools in Taunton Deane are now academies, and they are good models. I would just like to bend the Minister's ear and say that an injection of capital would not go amiss for many schools, because some would love to update their facilities or indeed just have a lick of paint.

To return to my starting point, a sound and well-planned framework for education will ensure a positive, productive and fulfilling future for students, whatever their background, with the consequent benefits to the economy. With the education for all Bill and the Higher Education and Research Bill, I am confident that we will move forward and sort out the skills gap and productivity issues in Taunton Deane.

I have a few more seconds, so I will just mention the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill. So many people have come to me because they want more say in local planning, so I applaud what is coming through. I am told that the Bill will enable us to sort out the legal framework that will enable us to set the precept on our council bills to fund the Somerset Rivers Authority. We are waiting for that and very much look forward to it being brought forward. I do not know whether we can get a view on that, but my people in Somerset will be delighted if we can move it forward. I commend the Bill and all its excellent opportunities.

4.40 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate, which provides an opportunity to make observations and comments on the entire Gracious Speech. I was pleased to see that the Government intend to bring in legislation to deal with reform of the prison system and bring forward provisions regarding adoption and children in care. Previous Labour Governments spent billions and billions of pounds on the education and health sectors, and put money into rehabilitation programmes and detoxification centres, so I am pleased about these provisions, which should help to tackle some of the issues and challenges in our prison system.

I am disappointed, however, that several things are not included in the Gracious Speech, and I will touch first on a couple of international issues. All Governments, irrespective of their political complexion, have systematically failed to deal with two of the oldest historical disputes that followed the collapse of the British empire after the

second world war. On Palestine and Israel, the Prime Minister has accepted that the state of Israel has undertaken half a million illegal settlements and the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. It is one of the biggest festering wounds in the middle east, and it needs to be resolved properly. On Kashmir, a UN resolution from 1948 states that Jammu and Azad Kashmir should be restored democratically through a free, impartial plebiscite, encouraging both the nuclear states to come together to deal with the issue. As a state that was involved with the two countries, we should be able to bring the two parties together and help to find a resolution.

I was concerned, and perhaps dismayed, when I heard about the counter-terrorism proposal and how the Prevent strategy will become even harsher. The way in which the strategy has been rolled out over the past few years has shown it to be ineffective and counter-productive. It has traumatised many young people who have been subject to it, and 90% of referrals have had no follow-up action. Even when such action has happened, it did nothing much apart from traumatise young children. The Home Secretary and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), who is present, must have heard about the numerous examples of young people being taken into the system. For example, one young person called a terraced house a "terrorist house" and another was carted off for talking about Palestine. Young children of six, seven or eight are completely traumatised by the experience of having to sit with intelligence officers and police officers. Even if they were not thinking about anything, they will certainly start thinking something after that.

I am not saying that radicalisation, of any sort, should not be dealt with or that it should be ignored, but it can be dealt with under the rubric of internet safety and teaching about online dangers, such as sexting, online bullying and child predators. One component of such training could be on violent extremism. It is a safe, sensible way of dealing with the situation, rather than trying to criminalise people. Even Sir Peter Fahy, the former chief constable of Manchester and head of Prevent, has said that Prevent is a waste of time, and the National Union of Teachers has also passed a motion to that effect. I therefore urge Ministers to re-examine the whole of Prevent, how it is being rolled out and how it is being dealt with in schools and universities. We all want to be safe. I was out of the country when the July bombings happened in London, but I used to take that bus route frequently when going to my chambers and I travelled at about that time of day. If I had not been out of the country, I could have been directly affected by that bombing. Obviously, the safety of people in this country is paramount to me and to everybody else, but the things we put in place to deal with these issues have to be effective.

I was also disappointed that the Queen's Speech contained no mention of house building; the abolition of the current system for personal independence payment assessments; whether steps are going to be taken to get more GPs and nurses into our NHS system; and reversing the rules on pension rights for women in their 50s. There was also nothing to address the situation of pensioners who live abroad. There seem to be two sets of pensioners, with one getting inflation-linked pensions and the other not getting them, despite having paid in



[Yasmin Qureshi]

about the same amount. In addition, no constructive proposals have been made as to how to get children out of poverty.

I welcome the U-turn on forced academisation, but this approach of having everything academised by a certain date should also be dropped. As has been alluded to by other Members, it should be left to individual schools, along with the parents and the community, to decide whether they go for academisation. The Labour Government introduced academies, but that was for schools that were struggling; it was not brought in for schools that were already successful. Essa Academy, in my constituency, was one of the first to become an academy under the Labour Government. Its students speak 46 different languages and it has new international arrivals, yet it has been a pioneering school in the United Kingdom in the use of mobile technology in its education system. Schools from across the UK have come to see its practices, and countries in Scandinavia, such as Sweden and Denmark, are following its systems. This school is producing interactive textbooks, and that allows for the accelerated cognition of complex processes. These books will become free to the whole world. I have an invitation from the acting chief executive and the principal, Dr Chohan, for the Secretary of State to visit the school, because he feels that if it was in London, all the Ministers, shadow Ministers and so on would be visiting it. This invitation is for our shadow Secretary of State as well.

Finally, I ask the Government to consider some targeted funding for schools in socially deprived areas. What do I mean by that? I am talking about extra provision for young children who are struggling in maths and English, and who will need extra help outside the classroom. I am talking about extra money for teaching English as a foreign or second language for mothers and parents of some of these children who struggle with English. That would be a constructive step towards helping those people whom we say should be helping their children. I am talking about more provision to help schools identify issues of bullying, drug addiction and gangs bullying young people into committing crimes. A lady came to my surgery recently crying and saying that she did not know what to do about her young son, who was being pushed by gangs into criminal activity. That is not an isolated incident, and we need more targeted resources. When a child gets into trouble schools do try to deal with it, so we are reactive, but we need more proactive policies in place so that we can identify and look at the concerns, challenges and dangers.

Finally, I wish to mention something that has nothing to do with education. I want to make a plea to the Chancellor: can I have a pot of money for my constituency so that I can get the roads repaired, as they have loads of potholes in them? I am happy to send a full costing of that to him.

4.49 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): It is certainly a pleasure to take part in this debate on Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. There is much that I welcome in the programme of government, and many of its measures will benefit the residents of Romsey and Southampton North.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi). I am sure that she and I agree on several measures to do with the care system and prison reform. I also wish to congratulate her because she managed to keep off the subject of the European referendum, as I shall do.

I wish to focus on education, training and skills, by which I mean all types of education and training. Sometimes I worry that we concentrate too narrowly on higher education and on those young people who are following a path to university. We must be conscious that education can happen at any age and, pretty much, in any place.

We should celebrate the fact that a teenager today might have as many as seven different careers in their lifetime and each one of those will require learning, change and an ability to adapt. Those essential life skills are introduced at school, but carry on throughout our lives. I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science say that it is never too late to learn, and in this place I am sure that every single one of us can say that every day.

One of my constituents, Paul Brinklow, whom I met at one of my surgeries, is a powerful advocate for post-16 education, by which he means not just FE colleges and universities, but the learning that goes on throughout life. People have to update to use new technology, to change careers, to do apprenticeships, to take part in remote learning, and to attend language schools. The list goes on and on. Very little attention is given to that aspect of learning, and there is too little understanding of it. It does not matter whether it is a jobseeker undertaking retraining, an elderly person learning to use the internet, or a prisoner learning new skills on the path to rehabilitation, it is all part of the learning journey.

My constituent Jim Davidson does amazing work with his charity Care after Combat, specifically working with former service personnel within the prison system to enable them to be rehabilitated. He helps to find them useful and productive work, somewhere to live, and someone to mentor them, and he helps to put them back on the path to being part of society. He has worked with several prison governors. Specifically, in my local prison in Winchester, the governor, David Rogers, was one of the early pilot champions of Care after Combat's work. When combined with education, this sort of initiative can and does have a real life-transforming impact. The success rate of the charity is quite phenomenal, and I commend the Justice Secretary for the support that he has given it. The charity is involved in a new scheme, the Road to Logistics, which helps ex-offenders who have been service personnel gain new skills and HGV licences with the haulage industry. That is all part of training and education to help them become a productive part of the workforce.

The Justice Secretary has plans to transform the prison estate, to increase the work opportunities for those in prison, and to make sure that an effective rehabilitation programme combined with educational opportunities will help to equip former prisoners for employment opportunities when they are released. Forty-six per cent. of people entering prison have literacy skills no higher than those broadly expected of an 11-year-old child. We have to use their time in prison to improve their skills and life chances—just like the 25% of prisoners who have been through the care system.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Education Secretary is in her place today and has heeded the concerns that some of us expressed to her about forced academisation, especially in places such as Hampshire where the local authority provides a great service to our local schools, which is recognised and appreciated by teachers, parents and governors alike. She will know that one of Romsey's headteachers described the education White Paper as the best he had ever read. She will also know that I support academies and that the two highest performing schools in my constituency are both academies. They do a brilliant job of supporting bright young people to fulfil their potential. They collaborate with local businesses, foster talent, and encourage students to learn music and languages, to travel and to play competitive sport. That does not mean that the schools in my constituency that are not academies do not do the same. I welcome the fact that they are to be given more time to make choices about whether to academise.

I welcome the freedoms regarding the school day, and the plans to make it longer. Many private schools provide a much longer school day than those in the state sector, and they use those additional hours for sport, music, art, the combined cadet force and the Duke of Edinburgh award. They are the sort of enrichment activities that give their pupils an advantage on their UCAS applications and an advantage in life. Heather McIlroy, headteacher of The Mountbatten School, is always challenging herself and her school to provide every advantage for her pupils that they would find in the private sector. The longer day will provide more chances and is part of that picture.

Finally, I want to talk about the other end of the age spectrum. If we are talking about education for all, it is important that we look at the life chances of our pre-schoolers. A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of visiting Chilbolton Pre-School, a typical small village pre-school with a professional staff, but in effect run by a team of incredible and dedicated volunteers. We all know that the first 1,000 days after conception are the most important in a child's life, so we must look at early years provision and how we can make that most effective.

The set-up at Chilbolton is similar to many pre-schools up and down the country. Run out of the local cricket pavilion, it operates five days a week, but with set-up and take-down required at the beginning and end of every week. In many ways it is better off than the pre-schools that operate out of village halls, which have that burden every day. The school's challenge comes in finding staff, especially when many of the villages are not easily accessible by public transport; finding volunteer chairmen and women and treasurers; and being able to offer the hours and flexibility needed to cater for the needs of children and parents, and also to meet the quite proper rigours of Ofsted.

I welcome the extension of free childcare to 30 hours. I know it is a good thing for parents seeking to return to work, and that it is good for children to be in a stimulating environment. Things like the forest school and the outdoor learning at Chilbolton are great for the local children, so I have a very simple comment to make. At 15 hours a week the pre-school is coping; at 30 hours, under the current funding arrangements, it will struggle. We do not want to lose such provision. Village pre-schools have been the lifeblood of communities for generations. I urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to

make sure that the 30 hours is sustainable not just in large-scale nurseries, but in small rural locations, and with her commitment to educational excellence everywhere, to make sure that rural provision, which is where we are nurturing the life chances of the next generation in some of the most incredible environments, is looked after.

4.56 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the Queen's Speech and to follow the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I agree with her about the importance of early-years education. She made an important point.

There was a major omission from this Queen's Speech. Following the Government's U-turn on forced academisation, we will have a Bill

"to lay foundations for educational excellence in all schools,"

whatever that may mean. We had the promise of legislation to support the establishment of new universities and

"to promote choice and competition across the higher education sector."

Yes, following the Government's failed £9,000 a year tuition fee experiment, which was never intended to have the result that all universities would charge the maximum £9,000, this Government are now going to give universities the freedom to charge even more, making a university education even more inaccessible to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not recognise that children from disadvantaged backgrounds have a much greater opportunity to go to universities in England and Wales than in Scotland, where the fee system means that it is a subsidy for the middle classes and not for poorer students?

**Liz McInnes**: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, and that is certainly not what is going on in my constituency, which I will elaborate on. The number of part-time students and mature students applying to go to university has plummeted since the introduction of tuition fees.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I cannot let the comment about Scotland pass. It is true that if we look at direct routes into university, Scotland has slightly lower numbers going from disadvantaged backgrounds, but if we look at more interesting routes into university through further education, Scotland is doing extremely well with children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Liz McInnes**: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I will go on to talk about further education, which is a key part of my speech.

The Minister for Universities and Science is no longer here, but I would like to point out that Labour is not opposed to new universities, despite the Minister's assumption. For his information, it was the Tory press that dubbed University College London "cockney college", not anybody from the Labour Benches.

What was missing from the Queen's Speech was the vital link between schools and universities—further education. Not a mention of it, yet it provides a vital

[Liz McInnes]

service to our young people, giving them opportunities, skills, training and the possibility of using FE as a stepping stone to higher education. Hopwood Hall College in my constituency, which serves Heywood and Middleton and the wider borough of Rochdale, has its own particular issues, none of which were addressed in the Queen's Speech. The lack of literacy and numeracy skills is a massive issue in the borough, and some students require an extra year at Hopwood Hall to improve on English and maths, but funding reduces once the learner hits 18, with no allowance made for that catch-up year.

The borough of Rochdale was one of the most affected by the cut to education maintenance allowance and by reduced payments to disabled learners. At this stage, I should declare an interest: my partner used to teach at Hopwood Hall College. When the coalition Government scrapped EMA, my partner had students coming to see him to say that, although they were enjoying the course and the opportunities it gave them, they simply could not afford to keep attending—without EMA, they could not afford the bus fare to college. What a lamentable state of affairs to leave our students in—denied an education because of the cost of a bus fare. With the area review of post-16 education, the problem is likely to be exacerbated, as courses are forced to combine. Some students could find themselves having to travel 30 to 40 miles to access their college courses.

The Greater Manchester area review is causing great concern in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Education because of ongoing delays. The chair of the steering group—the chief executive of Tory Trafford Council—warned that the process would lead to

“a fragmentation of the colleges in Greater Manchester”.

The borough of Rochdale also has one of the lowest rates of people going to university. Replacing maintenance grants with loans, and the thought of a £50,000-plus debt, have served as a massive deterrent. Students in England leave university with more debt than students anywhere else in the English-speaking world. They now owe an average of £44,000 on finishing, while Americans run up half that debt, and Canadians a third of it. When maintenance grants are abolished, the poorest students will end up owing more than £50,000, or over half the average price of a terraced house in my constituency.

How many working-class parents will talk their children out of ending up with such a huge debt? Well-off parents, who can afford to pay private school fees, will simply see the cost of a university education as a continuation of those fees, and their children will continue climbing the ladder, untroubled.

While we are talking about student debt, I would like to mention the proposal in the BBC White Paper to close the so-called iPlayer loophole. Doing that will force students living away from home who do not have a television but who access online BBC content to spend yet more money purchasing a yearly TV licence—as if our students were not in enough debt. A Change.org petition against the proposal, which was started by a student at Loughborough University, has now reached a staggering 16,847 signatures. I have asked the Culture Secretary to consider the particular situation students are in; so far, he has evaded my questions, but the

petition shows the strength of feeling among students and their families, and I hope he will agree to be bound by it.

Hopwood Hall College provides many innovative courses to help students who aspire to go to university. However, while students continue to face ever-mounting debts, there will be no answer to the social mobility problems in my constituency. The formation of new universities is not the solution, and the Government's own assessment shows that the number of FE college students applying for higher education will be lower than it is at present.

Further education is sandwiched in the middle of schools and higher education, with key stages 4 and 5 massively underfunded. Yet Hopwood Hall College and many FE colleges like it continue to succeed, seemingly against all the odds. We have 4,000 people in the borough doing vocational courses or A-levels who would previously have travelled outside the borough. We also have a lower level of NEETs—people not in education, employment or training—than neighbouring boroughs. Demand for courses in science and technology, and in health and social care, is increasing, and the college is responding to this, but there is a real challenge across the FE sector in attracting good teachers, especially in maths.

It really is time that this Government recognised the essential role of the FE sector and took some genuine action to address gaps in funding and the problems of recruiting and retaining good-quality teachers in order to achieve their stated aim of educational excellence for all—and that includes for my constituents in Heywood and Middleton.

5.5 pm

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): It is pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), who are both great champions of their constituents. It is a great honour to speak in this debate on the Gracious Speech.

Many hon. Members have spoken passionately about education, skills and training. It is absolutely vital that, as a nation, we get these elements right if we want to build up a cohort of our fellow citizens who are ready to face the world of work at 18 or 22, but also later in their lives as lifelong learners, because our workforce is changing, and our economy is changing, in a profound a long-lasting way.

I pay tribute to the Federation of Small Businesses for its excellent report, “Going it alone, moving on up: Supporting self-employment in the UK”, which provided many of the statistics that I will use in the next few minutes. Today 15% of the workforce is self-employed, compared with 8% in 1980. To support this strong and growing economy, we, as legislators, need to be as nimble as those entrepreneurs—that 15% of our constituents. There is always a balance between *laissez-faire* and red tape, and in our legislative programme we need to adapt to the changing economy.

I have great hopes of some of the Bills in the Gracious Speech, but I also have some questions for Ministers, and some suggestions on three Bills in particular. I would like to begin by speaking briefly on the better markets Bill. Competition law is always one step behind



the market; I speak as somebody who spent part of my training in a competition law department. I very much welcome this Bill to keep pace with the changing markets. I welcome the “faster switching” principle for energy suppliers. I have done that myself, as have many other right hon. and hon. Members, I am sure. I particularly welcome the clarification of the roles of economic regulators. We are dealing with very adept businesses—people who are highly lawyered—and if, as legislators, we want to protect consumers, we need strong measures in place.

I want to speak briefly about the regulation of one market that is quite unsexy but utterly vital—the water market. Last summer, my constituents in South Ribble, along with another 300,000 households in Lancashire, had no drinkable water for one month. The contamination of cryptosporidium in our drinking water had a massive effect on consumers and, particularly, on small businesses in the catering industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) has spoken about this because, of course, he has many cafés and restaurants in his constituency. That incident highlighted very clearly the monopolistic nature of the water market.

I am therefore happy that from April next year a new non-household retail water and waste water market will be opening up. However, I am concerned about the implications of this new regime for small businesses and sole traders, because after the cryptosporidium outbreak many small businesses found it hard to access the compensation—the process was not quite as simple as for domestic consumers. Ofwat has clearly stated that part of its remit in this new water market is to ensure that the market operates effectively. It has made representations to DEFRA Ministers that the guaranteed service standards should cover all non-household customers in the market. Unfortunately, there are no Business, Innovation and Skills Ministers present, but I am sure we will be told whether anyone from that Department has discussed the issue with DEFRA and whether the guaranteed service standards will be rolled into the better markets Bill.

From one unsexy subject—water and sewerage—to another, namely savings and pensions. Our national statistics on savings are woeful compared with those of our EU neighbours. The French save about twice as much as we do.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the hon. Lady agree that, if we are to address that issue, it is extremely important that financial education on both savings and financial management is taught at school?

**Seema Kennedy:** I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Lady. Some 21 million people in this country do not even have £500 of savings. As she has said, part of the reason for that is lack of financial education. I welcome the lifetime savings Bill, which will provide a flexible product that enables young people to save for a home and for their retirement, and the increase in the individual savings account limit.

The statistics on savings for the self-employed are even worse than those for the nation as a whole. Only 31% of respondents to the FSB survey said that they are saving into a pension, compared with 59% of people who are employed. The remaining respondents intend

to rely on their business and existing savings, and about 15% of them have absolutely no savings or pension plan. The lifetime ISA is welcome, but are there any plans to adapt it to suit the new and growing cohort of the self-employed? The age restriction limits it to the under-40s and there is growing evidence that more of the self-employed are aged 45 or over. I hope that the Government will consider finding ways of encouraging and normalising savings for the self-employed, because they do not get the same nudges that auto-enrolment gives people who are employed.

On the pensions Bill, I will not repeat the statistics of self-employed people who have no pension or savings plan, but I urge the Government to consider carefully the needs of the self-employed. The Work and Pensions Committee has made submissions about the issue, particularly in relation to the National Employment Savings Trust auto-enrolment scheme, to which MPs have signed up our own employees. It is very good, but it also needs to include a solution for the self-employed.

In an ideal world, the self-employed will go on to become micro-employers, or perhaps even large employers, and set up their own pension fund. There needs to be adequate communication with micro-businesses about their obligations under auto-enrolment, which can be burdensome. Once small businesses do set up pensions, robust regulation needs to be in place to ensure that such funds give good returns and are adequately protected.

The Bills on which I have touched briefly are welcome in adapting to our changing workforce. I look forward to seeing the detail as they progress through this place.

5.13 pm

**Rushanara Ali** (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the House that, at its heart, the Queen’s Speech has bold reforms to remove all barriers to opportunity for our young people. Let us see whether his rhetoric matches the reality.

Nearly 4 million children are growing up in poverty, and 500,000 of them live in London. In my constituency, 42% of children live in poverty—the highest rate in the country. Social mobility is in reverse, with young people suffering from what the Equality and Human Rights Commission says are

“the worst economic prospects for several generations”.

More than 850,000 young people remain not in education, employment or training. The reality is shocking, given that the UK is the fifth richest country in the world. Fighting inequality is not just about social justice; it is also in our economic interests.

If we look at the Government’s record over the last six years, we see that they have cut work experience entitlement and independent careers guidance and advice, and they have cut further education budgets by 24% since 2010. As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) highlighted earlier, that has devastated the lives of many people. Some 4 million people study in further education, and a high concentration of those are from working-class backgrounds. The cuts have hit ethnic minority students from London extremely hard, because of the disproportionate concentration of those groups in further education. In view of the work that the Minister for Universities and Science is doing on monitoring, transparency and tackling inequality, I ask him to look at the impact of those cuts on the

[*Rushanara Ali*]

FE sector. Many further education colleges, including Tower Hamlets College, have had to shrink student numbers and courses that many of my constituents attend.

The Government have tripled university fees and scrapped the education maintenance allowance. The Secretary of State and Ministers heard earlier about the devastating impact of those measures over the years and across the country on some of the poorest students, including those in my constituency. Student nurses' bursaries have been slashed, as have maintenance grants for poorer university students.

The focus in the Queen's Speech on life chances will prove to be meaningless without a parallel attempt to eradicate child poverty. Tired, hungry children cannot learn effectively, and it is shocking that millions of children come from families who rely on food banks. Poverty is not inevitable, and the Government have the tools to fix the problem if there is the will to do so. The last Labour Government cut child poverty by almost 1 million to the lowest level since the 1980s, but increases over the past six years under this Government have undone much of that progress. I call on the Schools Minister and the Secretary of State to continue to pay attention to this important issue, because it will affect educational attainment and the achievements of young people.

Let us look at the education for all Bill. As my hon. and right hon. Friends have mentioned, real-term cuts will be about 8% of funding per pupil by 2020, despite the Conservative party's manifesto commitment that funding would not be cut for schools and children. That is a betrayal of that manifesto commitment. Last year, more teachers quit than entered the profession. Almost 50,000 teachers quit—the highest figure since records began. Applications to teach are falling in every region, and they are down in key subjects such as English, maths and IT.

London's schools face unique challenges. London has some of the highest levels of inequality and child poverty in the country, and school budgets and classrooms are at breaking point, with one in five London secondary schools full or overcrowded. Yet London shows that it is possible to create outstanding urban schools in demanding circumstances. Thanks to the work of the last Labour Government, nine out of 10 schools in London are now good or outstanding. That is a huge achievement, which took a generation. The changes to the funding formula put that achievement at risk, so I ask the Schools Minister to look carefully at the funding formula to make sure that we do not go back on those achievements. London schools will lose nearly £240 million a year under the proposals. Schools in the midlands and the north of England will also be hit hard by the changes. We need to look at the needs of children in those schools and ensure that fairness genuinely means fairness.

On academies, the Government's obsession with structures rather than attainment is wrong-headed. The climbdown is welcome, but it is clear from what the Universities and Science Minister said earlier that the attempt to academise all schools still exists, although it will be done via a different route. That is likely to cost £1.3 billion—money that could be focused on tackling

underachievement rather than obsessing with structure. Where there is a problem and a need for innovation, of course that innovation should happen, but it should not be a wasteful process.

**Victoria Atkins** (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Does the hon. Lady greet with the same happiness as I do the fact that 1 million more children have gone to good or outstanding schools since 2010?

**Rushanara Ali**: Any improvement in attainment is welcome, but I am making a point about London, where huge amounts of work has been done to improve schools. When I was at school in the east end of London in the 1980s and 1990s, most schools achieved a rate of less than 20% for GCSEs. It took over a decade to transform schools, and that was not just in Tower Hamlets. In Tower Hamlets, we have only four academies, which shows that there are different models of improvement.

I call on the Secretary of State to look at how such improvements have been achieved through different approaches, including collaboration, investment in teacher quality and standards, and training and leadership. She knows very well that the model used in Tower Hamlets and across London is recognised around the world, and I hope that the new funding formula will not put that at risk.

**Jo Churchill**: I just want to point out that London schools have had a 26% uplift, whereas rural schools have had only a 9% uplift, so it is only fair, right and proper to address the basis of the funding.

**Rushanara Ali**: My point is not that schools in need of support in rural areas—there is poverty in rural areas as well—should not get support, but that we should not set schools and areas against each other or create divisions. The Government should look at where we need to target resources to improve schools, but should not turn regions or schools against each other. That is one of the major risks, as has already been reflected in this debate. We need to consider how to improve standards across the country without damaging the achievements of schools in London. We still need to raise the attainment of 40% of school kids.

I want to move on to the universities Bill. The Sutton Trust recently unearthed the fact that our young people leave university with the highest levels of debt in the English-speaking world. The Chancellor wrote to one of his constituents in 2003 that fees are “a tax on learning” and “very unfair”. Yet he has since tripled university fees to £9,000 and scrapped the student maintenance allowance. He now wants to lift the fees cap even higher, which will reverse some of the achievements of the past and saddle poorer students with huge amounts of debt. We all know that people from asset-rich families are more likely to take risks and more likely to be secure when they enter the labour market, and that the outcomes for graduates in the labour market differ according to social class and ethnic background. Saddling poorer students with debt therefore has real consequences for what they will go on to do.

Will the Minister for Universities and Science therefore look carefully at such outcomes? The data he is collecting will be useful only if he matches them with action to tackle the fact that inequalities are built in by students

being left in debt. The Government have ignored the evidence published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in 2014 showing that a £1,000 increase in maintenance grants led to a 4% increase in participation. The Minister says that participation is increasing, and when that happens, it is welcome, but I ask him to look at this area to see how to increase participation further.

I welcome the aim of increasing the number of apprenticeships to the target of 3 million, but there is a question, which has been raised by several of my hon. Friends, about the quality of those apprenticeships. I appeal to the Minister to look carefully at how we can make sure the system works well by focusing on quality. A sizeable number of young people are still on courses at level 2 and level 3, for which they have parallel qualifications. We need to make sure that they genuinely progress and that apprenticeships are a genuine alternative.

5.25 pm

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali).

I welcome wholeheartedly the programme on life chances—not only the measures on education, skills and training that we are debating, but the interconnectivity between the other Bills. In proposing the Humble Address, my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) reminded us that bringing up children is an inexact science, with a definite beginning but certainly no definite end date. There is also no guarantee of success, however that might be measured, and there most certainly is not a handbook. My children have attended their state schools and are now at university, acquiring debt. I hope that we, as parents, have instilled in them an aspiration for a better life. That is why I believe that life chances are so very important.

We have an excellent education system in this country, which helps parents and carers through the minefield that we hope will level the playing field for all our children to ensure that every child reaches their full potential. The 30 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds—with the caveats outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes)—the 1.4 million more children now taught in good and outstanding schools, and the measures to drive aspirations and skills, coupled with 3 million apprenticeships, mean that this is a coherent lifetime learning package, and much more than is being put to us by the Opposition, who as yet still have space to come forward with their bright ideas. The Sutton Trust and others have noted that one of the most important parts of education is good quality feedback. That might be something for them to take on board.

I welcome the announcement of a Bill to lay the foundations for educational excellence in all schools. Early years education is vital to ensure readiness for school. A couple of weeks ago, I was fortunate to open the excellent Guildhall Feoffment Pre-school and Nursery in my constituency, and I have spoken with other providers of excellent early years education in towns and in rural locations such as Bacton. Sadly, despite the best efforts of skilled early years teachers it is estimated that in some areas up to 25% of children starting in reception are still in nappies and lack many communication and manual dexterity skills. I am glad that we are trying to

seek solutions to those problems, but I urge us to make bold plans, using speech therapists and other professionals to support parents as their children grow.

Like many hon. Members, I welcome the news that a fairer funding formula will be addressed. Unfairness is inherent in the current formula. I apologise to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow if she felt that my intervention was creating an adversarial tone on this issue. I very much do not feel that way, but my children received £260 less funding than the national average, which is considerably less than children in London have received for many years. It is important that that anomaly is addressed.

Although the new policies on schools are most welcome, they must allow for the fact that schools in largely rural constituencies such as mine will struggle on several levels. Rurality and sparsity are just two. The issues are not insurmountable, but they need to be acknowledged, and I thank the Secretary of State for being in listening mode recently on academisation. I hope that we can move forward to provide the right solution for all children.

Children in rural areas suffer from the vagaries of rural transport systems, meaning that they are isolated from choices given to their urban-dwelling peers. Although after-school clubs are to be truly welcomed, there is less opportunity for them to run if there is a solitary bus service that leaves five minutes after school ends. We have to consider carefully how rural school transport will fit into the overall plan alongside academies, which are masters of all aspects of their own planning. I ask Ministers to do a rural test when asking questions about education, to ensure that, whether rural or urban, schools can offer the same to their students so that they are all well served.

As our children proceed through their education, we must ensure that we value and nurture the different skills and abilities they display. While supporting the rise in standards, we must keep the ability to problem solve in our education system. At a visit this week to Vapourtec, a high-tech company in my constituency, we spoke about the need for people to use intuition and other such elements of their learning, which is not necessarily always about ticking boxes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) spoke about a joined-up strategy on science for the Bills presented, which is of huge importance. My four daughters constantly remind me that academic excellence is to be applauded, but we must also cherish practical skills in our children, as well as a softer skill set. I have been fortunate to visit two schools in the past couple of weeks. At Stowmarket High I saw excellent “resistant material” skills, and the fantastic boats and beds that were produced for their exams.

West Suffolk further education college does not display some of the problems that I have heard about this afternoon. It is innovative and works closely with local organisations, the local enterprise partnership, and local businesses in being an achiever, rather than something that presents me with problems. With the newly opened campus of the University of Suffolk on its premises, it is one of only two FE colleges that are paired with leading arts institutions in London. Only last Friday I spoke to young people who are off to the Central School of Art and Design and the London College of Fashion. Education is about building aspirations that are not limited by



[Jo Churchill]

background, gender, age, accessibility or disability. I alluded earlier to the fact that we must recognise that attainment is not purely from an academic standpoint.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The hon. Lady spoke about the difference between rural and urban, and I fully support aspects of her outlook on the rural negativity that sometimes exists. She mentioned the joined-up approach, and we should consider the proposed legislation on adoption for looked-after children. Would it be a positive move if the Government were to introduce that adoption Bill in conjunction with educational projects?

**Jo Churchill:** I totally concur. The ability to look cross-departmentally at all the different issues that challenge people from the beginning to the end of their life would enhance us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) mentioned excluded children, and those who struggle with formal educational attainment. Before I came to this place, I worked on a “Solutions 4” programme with excluded children, and we must remember all our children when introducing these Bills. With a background in the construction industry and a love of life sciences, I believe that apprenticeships are important in helping all children to lift their abilities and attainment rates. For some apprenticeships, however, we must recognise that more functional levels of core subjects should be acceptable, and we run the risk of losing able youngsters who cannot cross the C-grade barrier in maths and English. I am delighted that a Government taskforce has been set up, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), to consider apprenticeships for those with learning difficulties.

I recently met a lovely young woman who had been part of a very innovative scheme. When I asked what it had given her she said, “It’s given me confidence and a job”, and then she whispered, “a boyfriend as well, but please don’t tell my Dad”—that is probably too late. It struck me that a basic entitlement for all young people leaving education is, perhaps not the boyfriend, but the right to feel valued and equipped for the workplace. I applaud the work that we are doing to ensure that employment and apprenticeships are accessible to all, but we should also consider young people’s mental health as we drive these Bills forward, since such issues put a huge strain on our schools. West Suffolk College reckons that 70% of pastoral care time is spent considering the resilience and mental health of its young people. That is an enormous burden for schools and colleges to take forward, and we must do more work in that area.

Finally—and quickly—my daughters have been participants and mentors in the National Citizen Service, which provides young people with challenges through which they grow in confidence and team build. It attracts children from every walk of life, including those who might have had the odd brush with the law or started down the road to addiction, looked after children, and those from all types of educational background. Over four weeks they complete outward bound training, visit higher education establishments—

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

5.34 pm

**Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and the many other hon. Members who have spoken about their concerns and problems relating to education. The same problems exist in Northern Ireland and I can learn a great deal by listening. I thank all hon. Members who have spoken.

It is a pleasure to be able to respond to the Gracious Speech. Earlier, one Member, when trying to choose what to speak about, described it as a cornucopia. Another, rather closer to my heart, described it as a box of chocolates—that might explain why I have to wear a double-breasted jacket. There are so many things I want to talk about and welcome, but I will start by saying that if we are looking to increase fees for universities, it is vital that we ensure—this was raised earlier—that students receive a quality education. I have four children. One is through university, two are at university and one is about to go. The same issue comes up again and again: how do we ensure value for money while keeping the costings right so that everyone has the chance to go to university?

In Northern Ireland, we have had a major battle on STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. We want to get these subjects into the education system, so that science is a part of pupils’ lives right from the early days. It is not working well in Northern Ireland at the moment. This leads me to another point. Hon. Members know that I passionately believe in holding the Union together, and in working together and learning from each other. There is very good education on STEM here for teachers; indeed, we send one or two from Northern Ireland to that college. We need more. We need to all start working together.

When we look at the difference in cost of different universities, what worries me is that in Northern Ireland something like 46% of students do not want to leave Northern Ireland. That is lovely from the point of view of not having a brain drain, but it means that no one moves away from home. I want the Union to work so that we all share and all thrive and people can move to different parts, whether to England, Wales or Scotland. It is essential that people get used to moving and having independence while at the same time being at home.

The same sort of thing happens with the exam system. Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland all have different exam systems, so people are judged in different ways. Can we put something in place to make our education systems all talk to each other and all learn from each other? Fantastic things are happening in education in Scotland. I know that because I went there with the Northern Ireland Committee for Education. There is so much we can share. Let us put something in place that means we do all learn from each other.

I watched the plans on academies to see how they work and many of the things going through here. That is what we should all be doing: we should be learning from each other. Academies seem like terrific ideas, but we have to be careful how we put them together to make sure they allow everyone to achieve.

Hon. Members discussed a fairer funding formula. We have exactly this problem in Northern Ireland and we have debated it twice in the past five years. I want to share with the House a huge problem we have at the

moment, so Members realise that in Northern Ireland, although we have a great education system, things are not working particularly well. In my patch, 19 of the top principals came to see me the other day. All were complaining that they have to deal with an 8% cut or increase in costs. They are being told they must come up with new budget plans for one year and for three years. They cannot do it. They are refusing. They are looking at stopping special needs teaching, removing classroom assistants, moving office staff and having bigger classes—all the things that are just wrong. We need something to change. What I found most frightening is that the principals are not taking their pay rises so that the school can afford other things. Even worse, funds raised by parent-teacher associations are being used to pay for the normal things in schools. I go back to my main point: let us start sharing and learning from everyone. There is a change today in Northern Ireland: there is no longer a Sinn Féin Education Minister. As from today, the Education Minister is a Unionist. I hope things will change.

I turn now to a passion of my heart. Last year, I led a debate on how Stormont was not working. I was proud of my party leader for then moving into opposition at a time when opposition did not really exist. Opposition now does exist, as part of the Stormont House agreement, and I am proud to say that the Ulster Unionists, under my party leader, have moved into opposition, as has the SDLP, which I am pleased to have with us. Our devolved system of government does not work well, and I need support from the UK Government and everyone in the House to get the opposition system working and resourced. To give one simple example, in this place, on which we model our Assembly, the Chamber is laid out so that we oppose each other, but Sinn Féin and the DUP, although working together, refuse to sit on the same side, for obvious reasons. We have to learn and improve. I hope we can get somewhere but we need the House's help.

I was always annoyed to hear the Secretary of State say that all parties agreed to the Stormont House agreement. That was not the case. They talked to us at the beginning but only the two major parties were really involved. We must all start working together and helping each other. We can push and coax to make things work, but I need the UK Government to listen, not to bury their head in the sand. We still have problems—we have the troubles—but we want a level playing field. Certain things came through in the Belfast agreement, and we thought we were moving forward with consensus, but I am concerned that the legacy issues are sitting there ready to bubble up.

We hear that the DUP and Sinn Féin might already have done a deal on the legacy issues. We must talk to servicemen and ex-servicemen and make sure that whatever we put in place works and is fair and justified. I do not ask that people who have done something wrong in the military not be prosecuted; I ask that we choose the right cases and not hound every serviceman. We must find a just way forward that is about reconciliation, understanding and putting the past to bed. For that, I need the House's help.

In the remaining 30 seconds, I want to touch briefly on Europe. Please, let us get as many of the facts as we can on the table and avoid the hype, so that people can sit down and learn. The message I got on the doorstep was: “We want to learn, we want the facts, but please

don't overhype it, or we'll all switch off.” People just want the yes and no campaigns to lead quietly, put the facts on the table and let people decide for themselves.

5.42 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I welcome the Minister back to his place and suggest that he reads *Hansard* later, because he missed a very good Front-Bench speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray).

This alleged legislative programme lacks imagination, is lacklustre and ultimately fails to address the challenges facing the country. The Queen's speech was 937 words long, lasted less than nine minutes and has been rightly condemned for being uninspiring and offering no vision. Is this the sign of a Government who have run out of ideas in facing up to the challenges the country and our constituents face, or is the Prime Minister just too busy fighting his party's internal EU civil war? The country cannot wait for the Government Benches to kiss and make up. We need a Government focused on building a fairer and more prosperous country, not one at odds over the EU referendum or distracted by its election expenses.

Ultimately, the Queen's Speech does nothing to help realise the potential of our young people, our students or our education sector. Last week, amid all the doom and gloom of the UK Government's Queen's Speech, the SNP, as any Opposition party worthy of Government should, put forward an alternative Queen's Speech that offered real positive change. At the heart of it was a progressive set of values that would help to realise the potential of our young people. In it, the SNP again called for the post-study work visa to be reinstated. This came on the back of an international students survey conducted by Hobsons that underlined the importance of such a visa as an incentive for international students when deciding whether to come to Scotland to study.

The SNP has long called for the visa to be reinstated. Indeed, I held my first Westminster Hall debate on the very issue. We are supported by Scotland's universities, colleges, businesses and all parties, including the Conservatives, in the Scottish Parliament. The visa gave those international students the opportunity to live and work in Scotland after they had graduated from one of our excellent universities. The closure of the post-study route to remain has effectively removed that opportunity.

This is what has led to the disgraceful planned deportation of the Brain family from Dingwall. The Chancellor's wholly ignorant and cold indifference to the plight of a seven-year-old Gaelic-speaking boy who has known no other home than the Scottish highlands was one of the worst answers I have heard in this place since I was elected. The Government must do the right thing and U-turn on their current position. They have certainly had plenty of practice of late.

This decision and the removal of the visa itself not only damages our international reputation, but is an economically illiterate policy, because the vast majority of these students are not able to contribute to the country that has provided them with an excellent higher education. For example, research undertaken by the Scottish Government's post-study working group suggested that a number of new entrants to Scottish universities from India fell by 63% between 2010-11 and 2013-14.

[Gavin Newlands]

It could be argued that colleges have been hit harder following the demise of the visa, as the number of international students studying in Scotland's colleges has fallen from 2,039 in 2010-11 to 561—a shocking decline of 72%. The removal of the visa sends a clear message to our important international market that the UK FE and HE sectors are closed for business. The visa has supporters in this place beyond these Benches. The all-party group on migration produced a report, whose Conservative chairman noted:

“Higher education is one of our country's leading export success stories, but the government's current approach to post-study work is jeopardising Britain's position in the global race for talent”.

With the negative tone pursued by the UK Government over the EU referendum, combined with the removal of the post-study work visa, it has become increasingly clear that this Government are out of step with what is best for our universities. The Higher Education and Research Bill, one of the few announced in the Queen's Speech last week, contains some worrying reforms that the Government plan to bring forward. It would appear that the Government are once again working against the wishes of students when it comes to designing an education system for the 21st century.

The NUS has expressed deep concern about the unhealthy fixation of this Government with university marketisation, which, combined with the threat of lifting the £9,000 cap on tuition fees, has led the NUS to announce its intention to oppose the most damaging aspects of the Bill. In addition, it completely opposes any link between perceived teaching quality and fees.

Another issue that is not going to go away is the Chancellor's crazy policy of abolishing bursaries for those studying to become the next generation of nurses, midwives and allied health workers. The arguments to see the reinstatement of the bursary support are well trodden and despite this issue being devolved, I have made them at length in this House. Thanks to the report published today by London Economics, we now have a better understanding of what the impact of the change will be. The students and HE institutions themselves will be significantly worse off and the cost savings to the Exchequer are, in the end, likely to be very minimal.

Students and graduates will be hit with a punitive 71% increase in the cost of going to university and will see their debt on graduation rising from just under £7,000 to just under £49,000. This will undoubtedly hit the numbers applying to study these courses, with London Economics forecasting a 6% to 7% fall in student numbers or more than 2,000 in the first year. Along with other factors, this will result in these institutions losing between £57 million and £77 million a year. Not only will the Government fail to address the shortfall in nurses coming into the NHS; they will actually make the problem more acute, and we will have to rely on migrant nurses coming from other countries whose nursing resources are already stretched as a result of emigration to the UK.

This Queen's Speech represents a missed opportunity truly to transform the education sector. Teachers, pupils and university and college staff are working incredibly hard. It is disappointing that the Government have chosen not to match that level of hard work by introducing a programme of government to meet the challenges of a 21st-century education sector.

The SNP Scottish Government are going in the opposite direction. Instead of working against students and universities, we are working with them. Whereas the Tories promote front-door tuition fees down here and back-door tuition fees in Holyrood, the SNP Scottish Government have guaranteed free university education in Scotland. Our fundamental principle is that university access should be on the basis of the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

It appears that the EU referendum and quashing noisy Tory Brexit voices are the priority for the Prime Minister and his Government colleagues. This is at the expense of growing our economy, creating jobs and delivering a modern and inclusive education sector of excellence. The UK Government cannot and should not be defined by a single issue. If they have run out of steam and ideas, I would strongly suggest that they take a good look at the SNP's alternative Queen's Speech.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A seven-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

5.49 pm

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Many Members on both sides of the House will agree that good education provision is a sure way to reduce inequality and create economic prosperity. Indeed, my very presence here as a Member of Parliament was spurred on by the good vocational opportunities that I had in the further education sector in Greater Manchester. Let me begin by thanking the Minister for Schools, who is present, for engaging in a constructive meeting with me, along with other Oldham Members, to discuss Oldham education. I look forward to him visiting Oldham in the near future.

In the House, we often talk about the most vulnerable, and about enabling all children to have the best start in life. Just over a year ago, when I made my maiden speech, I talked about being a young mum at 16, and about the disadvantages, the opportunities and the aspirations of people from my constituency and my background. I believe that many people outside the House, if not inside it, will relate to some of what I will say today. I hope to do justice to the many constituents—especially young people—who may make journeys similar to mine, and to inspire them to reach for the stars, because they truly can do their best and fulfil their dreams.

I was the child so many Members have spoken about today, and I feel an obligation to talk about that. I grew up on a council estate, and my parents and I were recipients of welfare throughout my childhood. I was on free school meals, I was a NEET—not in education, employment or training—and I had no GCSEs at grade A to C; and, as I said, I had a baby at 16. School, for me, was not a place where you went to be educated, but a place where you got away from your parents for a couple of hours while they got some respite from you, and where you were able to see your mates. Rather tragically, it was also the place where I got a hot dinner. I often did not have a hot meal when I went home, and I often went to school without having had breakfast, so getting to lunchtime was quite tricky for me.



My mum could not read or write, so it was difficult for her to give me the ability to be school-ready. I did not see books, and did not see the value of books, until I went into education, so I know how crucial it is to provide early years intervention and to give people opportunities and aspirations. The interventions from which I benefited provided role models. The Sure Start centres, for instance, helped me to be a better mum when I was 16. That broke a cycle, and the fact that it is possible to break the cycle is clearly demonstrated by the fact of my being in this place today.

The youth service gave me chocolate biscuits in the evenings, and somewhere safe to go. It gave me respite. The welfare support enabled me not to be like other lost families, and be without my son. My son is with me today, and I am so proud of him: he is a great young person. There was housing, further education and the local education authority, and there were the teachers who inspired me to dream and to do my best. I fear, though, that the Government's austerity programme is pulling that ladder up. I think about all the things that I hold dear, and I look back to how they helped me to progress. It worries and upsets me that the young people in my constituency will not be given that opportunity.

I saved lives, and had an impact on lives, every day in my previous role as a home help, because I had been given the opportunity to go back into further education and obtain a vocational qualification in care. That was tremendously important to me. However, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), the further education sector was barely mentioned in the Queen's Speech. That will be really detrimental to the ability of people like me to contribute to the economy and to progress with their education.

Colleges in my constituency are having to deal with the loss of nearly 40% of their income as a result of Government cuts. As I heard from the principals of both Tameside College and Ashton Sixth Form College just last week, those cuts are leaving many young people behind, unable to obtain level 2 qualifications, and struggling to serve the employers whose businesses so desperately need to grow. During my visit to Tameside College last week, I saw some of the excellent work that it was doing with the local construction industry to attract young apprentices from across Tameside, despite the Government's assault on further education. The local construction training boards, working with Tameside College and the council, will get Tameside building again.

These colleges offer a lifeline to some of the most disadvantaged people in our community. For some, like me, that truly is a second or third chance. Surely the Minister is aware that without an adequate further education service, the talents of many young, and not so young, people will be shamefully wasted. This Government's failure to protect further education funding has meant that the post-16 sector now has a debt of £1.5 billion, and 80 colleges are in discussions about mergers in order to survive—a full 40% of the total.

Both management and unions in our local colleges have warned me that student and staff morale is at an all-time low in my community, in this age of cuts and uncertainty. This has to change. The Government have to listen. Today, the Greater Manchester area-based

review will make its final recommendations. That report is nearly six months behind schedule, and the process has turned college against college. I appeal to Ministers to do more. Further education is crucial in bridging a gap for young people, particularly those like me who come from a disadvantaged background. Ministers have to do more to give those young people a second chance, so that many more Angela Rayners can come into this House in the future.

5.56 pm

**Julie Cooper** (Burnley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the moving and powerful speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). I am really grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I was pleased to hear in the Queen's Speech that the Government intend to deliver opportunity for all at every stage of life. This is a worthy aim, and the Government are quite right to focus on the pursuit of educational excellence. It is to the education for all Bill that I would like to address my remarks.

The pursuit of educational excellence is undoubtedly the best way to enhance the life chances of individuals, and a well educated, skilled workforce is essential for a successful economy. So far, so good. Sadly, however, these words do not seem to translate into the right actions. Let us consider the whole academies fiasco. It is widely accepted by educationists the length and breadth of the country that children learn best when they have access to high-quality teaching provided by qualified teachers, irrespective of the structure. It matters not whether this teaching takes place in an academy, a university technical college or a local authority school. What matters for the sustainability of the provision is that there is an overarching educational strategy that plans for the education of each and every child.

I have no objection in principle to the introduction of academies, but they should operate as an integrated part of a planned provision, because children are not customers and education is a right, not a market commodity. Nowhere is this better evidenced than in my own constituency of Burnley. In 2009, the Labour Government built five new secondary schools there. They replaced buildings that were no longer fit for purpose; many had become severely dilapidated. In my son's school on a rainy day—there are quite a few of those in Burnley—it was a common sight to see a row of buckets down the corridor because of a leaking roof. It was clear that none of those schools was fit for purpose in 21st-century Britain.

I was lucky enough, around that time, to gain experience of schools in Japan and Germany, and I was struck by the stark contrast between the facilities on offer to our children and the high standards available to German and Japanese children. I was quite angry at the time, because I have always believed that British children deserve the best. Of course, as a teacher, I know that there is more to education than mere school buildings. In Burnley, there is a willingness in all sectors to raise educational standards. The teachers, the key stakeholders and, most of all, the pupils are really working hard on this. It was a real pleasure last week to visit Hameldon Community College in my constituency and to hear of the students' ambition and their dedication to doing well in life. That was indeed a privilege.

[Julie Cooper]

Yes, there is more to education than mere buildings, but there is no doubt that providing a stimulating learning environment that is warm and dry is immensely beneficial. Ahead of the £150 million building programme, the local authority expended a lot of time, thought and effort to ensure that the schools were built in the right places, to ensure an appropriate geographical distribution. It was decided that six schools would be replaced by just five to reflect a falling school population.

In 2013 and against that background, the coalition Government opened a university technical college in Burnley. The £10 million college, housed in a regenerated mill, was and is an impressive facility, aimed at providing 14 to 19-year-olds with a specialist engineering and construction curriculum. There is no doubt that the children who have attended the college have benefited immensely and that both students and parents are absolutely devastated at the recent news that the Department for Education intends to close the college due to inadequate numbers. Everyone in Burnley wanted the UTC to succeed, but there were never enough 14-year-olds to go around and the college was seriously undersubscribed from the outset. Instead of being part of a comprehensive plan, the college was forced to compete for students. The headteachers at neighbouring local authority schools were asked effectively to promote the UTC and to encourage their 14-year-olds to move schools. In the marketplace scenario created by the coalition Government and continued by the present Government, it was a bit like suggesting to Asda that it asks customers to go to Tesco.

Of course, none of that is the fault of the students or their parents. They took up offers of places at the UTC in good faith, never dreaming that the Government would pull the plug. Shockingly, only a few weeks' notice of closure has been given. I urge the Government to work with me in the short term to secure the education of students who have been pursuing a specialist curriculum for three years. They need and deserve our support. The Government have at the very least a moral duty to honour the contract that they entered into with those students and their parents. I know that on the rare occasion that a local authority school closes, there is a phased closure to ensure that current students are protected. The Government owe these students that much.

If that is not enough, knowing full well that there is a surplus of school places, it beggars belief that the Government have allowed a new free school to open in Burnley. The school opened in September 2014 in temporary accommodation and will soon move into its new premises, being built as I speak, at a cost of £24 million. To be absolutely clear, the school population is falling and the Department for Education plans to close a college and is building another school at the same time. Is that part of the plan for excellence in education? Is that part of the plan to further the life chances of children in Burnley? It does not really look like a plan, but more like an expensive and damaging free-for-all.

6.2 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I want to focus my contribution on higher education and lifelong learning, which has the tortured acronym of HELL. There is plenty to go on not only in the Gracious

Speech but in last week's White Paper, which is titled "Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice". I contend that it is the bit after the colon that is simply not matched by this Government's actions.

Teaching excellence is ostensibly dealt with in the teaching excellence framework, which has already caused widespread concern, uniting Universities UK, the National Union of Students and my alma mater, the University of Cambridge. There are serious worries that linking teaching excellence to fee levels with a performance element will undermine teaching. It will force universities into further competition and represents a homogenisation of teaching standards. This Government said that they were into devolution, after all. Linking fees to inflation could see fees being hiked up to 10 k—who knows?—and there is a worry that the TEF could be a Trojan horse for a further lifting of the fee cap to who knows where. The University of Cambridge has argued that linking the TEF and the fee cap will deter students from lower-income backgrounds. In short, therefore, only the wealthiest will be able to afford the top universities. The NUS is also opposed to the change.

Other eye-catching features include the plan to introduce new universities and so-called challenger institutions, seemingly though a relaxation of the criteria to usher in what is, at best, deregulation and, at worst, privatisation through the back door. The threshold of 1,000 students to qualify as a university is to be lifted. New providers can get degree-awarding powers in three years and full university status after another three years. Due to the probationary period during which institutions can grant degrees, there is the prospect of students getting a degree from an institution that then fails its probation. What would happen to those students?

There are question marks all over the place here. The removal of safeguards means that these untried, untested challenger institutions could expand very rapidly and then contract rapidly if they all start failing their three-year probation. As well as the standards issue, there seems to be a huge oversight on the whole issue of further education, which my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) so powerfully described. Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College in my constituency has recently given its 500th MBA. These institutions already have degree-awarding powers, so what will be the place for them? It is all very unclear.

Caution is being sounded across the sector. The Russell Group, which comprises our oldest institutions—the Oxbridges are all in there—has worries about this move undermining the international reputation of UK universities. Million+, at the other end, which represents the post-1992 sector and, thus, 50% of all full-time students in the UK, including those at the University of West London in my constituency, talks about the risk this approach poses to students. Universities UK says that these new institutions potentially devalue the label. It is important to remember that universities do not just operate to award degrees, but have a much wider civic role in the community, spreading public good and so on.

The White Paper also has a strapline on "improving social mobility". Everyone has referred to the much talked of letter from the young, promising Member for Tatton in 2003, who promised that he would abolish fees if the Conservatives were elected. It has rightly

become an internet sensation, because of some of the things he was incredulous about at the time. He talked about fees, which at the time were £1,000 only—they rose subsequently and there was then a trebling to £9,000 under this Government's watch. He also talked about how people were leaving with an average debt of £18,000 at the time, but it seems that the sky is the limit on both of those things under the proposals in this White Paper and this Queen's Speech.

There are worries about these so-called reforms, in relation to the funding cuts, the tuition fee increase and the potential to destabilise the whole sector, which has knock-on effects for students. The Sutton Trust, which I mentioned earlier, has warned that, even if participation levels are going up, there is a yawning gap between those from the richest and the poorest wards, particularly in Russell Group institutions. Again, there are lots of question marks in respect of the Office for Fair Access, overarching powers and how they have the potential to erode institutional autonomy. The idea of covering action and participation in the mission statement for this new office for students is laudable, but let us not forget that if we are talking about lifelong learning, this Government have slashed education maintenance allowance, ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—adult skills and social mobility funding, and have abolished maintenance grants and the child trust fund, which was mentioned earlier. I am therefore not filled with confidence as to what this White Paper and Queen's Speech will lead to next.

I could go on and on, as I was employed in the university sector before I got to this place. In one way or another I was in universities for 25 years before May 2015. People from my old union, the University and College Union, are on picket lines today because of the plummeting staff morale, the rocketing number of staff on zero-hours contracts, the creeping casualisation and a real-terms decline in pay. All these things have knock-on effects on students, and we all want the best student experience for all. I could talk about the Higher Education and Research Bill, a dog's breakfast on which there has not been proper consultation with the unions or providers. As everyone is preoccupied with the EU referendum, let me also say that if we were to live in a post-Brexit world, the science budget for this country—even student mobility programmes such as Erasmus—would be seriously imperilled. I know that that is not strictly what we are talking about today, but I caution against voting leave for that reason.

Teaching excellence is not assured in these plans, social mobility is poised to go backwards and student choice is completely illusory in what we are being offered. Lifelong learning should also look at other pathways. The number of part-time students is down 38% and the number of mature students has decreased by 180,000 since 2010. Lifelong learning should not just be about offering a cut-price “Brideshead Revisited”, via pile 'em high, flog 'em off so-called challenger institutions. As I have run out time, I will end there.

6.9 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): The Queen's Speech set out the Government's intention to publish a life chances strategy, which I understand will be separate from, but run alongside, their new indicators for child poverty, which are being introduced as part of the

Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. What could be more fundamental to improving life chances than improving access to education, skills and training?

On Friday, I hosted an all-party group event on adult education and its future at the Carr Bridge community centre in Woodchurch in my constituency. The event was part of a piece of research being carried out by the Workers Educational Association and the University of Warwick, and it brought together experts in the field from right across Merseyside, including Wirral Metropolitan College, Wirral Council, Unite the union and staff from Ganneys Meadow nursery school who voluntarily provide GCSE maths classes for parents, because they know the value of the trusted community setting.

The conversation that afternoon was rich and valuable, and I wish to focus on two areas that were discussed with real passion. The first was the provision of literacy and numeracy classes to people with no qualifications or with low levels of qualification, and the second was the provision of a broad curriculum for all adults with a desire to learn and the need for us to rediscover a vision for lifelong learning in our country.

We know that there is a real problem with basic literacy and numeracy skills among adults in this country. The latest survey published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2011 found that nearly 15% of 16 to 65-year-olds—around 5 million people—are functionally illiterate. That is a really damning indictment of one of the richest countries on earth. A total of 23.7% of participants in the survey—around 8 million people—lacked basic numeracy skills.

In 2013, an OECD study of 24 developed countries ranked England 11th in literacy and 17th in numeracy for people aged 16 to 65. Those aged between 16 and 24 fared even worse, being ranked 22nd and 21st respectively.

Last week, when I was walking down a road I saw a couple of children out playing. They were probably aged between three and four years old. All of a sudden, their mother appeared, tearing down the street and swearing at them to get back indoors. As I looked at them, it was clear to me that there was no future for those children. Their mother needs help.

I know from my own experience as a former adult basic skills tutor the powerful impact that the provision of free, friendly and accessible classes in the community setting can have on the lives of people who struggle to find the confidence to read and to write. I know, too, the powerful self-esteem that can flow when an adult is given the opportunity to learn—after all, we have all experienced that ourselves.

Seeing the mother and her children reminded me of the scene in “A Christmas Carol” where the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Scrooge two children emerging from under his robe. He describes them as “wretched, abject, frightful, hideous and miserable.”

Scrooge asks Spirit, “Are they yours?” The Spirit replies:

“They are man's... This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware of them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy... beware ignorance the most.”

That message is as true today as it was in Dickens's time. We all know the adage, “Teach the mother and father and you will teach the child.” If we are to break cycles of deprivation, we must provide opportunities to learn in accessible community settings free of charge. To pass through this world unable to read and write with confidence



[Margaret Greenwood]

is to experience a deprivation that few of us in this House can truly imagine. As one of the richest countries on earth, it is unacceptable that we allow this need to go unmet, yet the figures are telling. The total cut in the adult skills budget between 2010 and 2011 and 2015 and 2016 is around 37% in real terms, which has decimated local services, hence the need for voluntary provision, which I find unacceptable.

Then there is the matter of how we value those who teach basic literacy and numeracy. I know myself that tutors are very often on insecure and temporary contracts, and yet the work that they do is often as important as that of psychologists, nurses and language therapists. We need to provide a clear career structure and training for these basic skills tutors that properly rewards them and the work that they do.

Let me now turn to the matter of wider adult education provision, including those classes for which there is no requirement to take an exam or acquire a qualification. Back in the 1970s, we could walk past any number of schools in the evening and see the lights ablaze with classes full of people studying art, maths, Spanish, history, woodwork and yoga—the list was endless. We all recognise the value of having access to a swimming pool to maintain our physical health. Why do we not pay similar attention to public provision to foster creativity and maintain mental health? Why do we not value education for education's sake and understand that some people want to learn without working to an exam? This is particularly important in an ageing society in which social isolation is a growing and significant public health issue. Education has an important role to play in tackling that. I believe we should foster a positive culture of lifelong learning so that we can all continue to learn, grow and share with others in our communities. To ignore our creativity and our ability to learn is to deny our society its full potential and deny all of us our humanity.

6.15 pm

**John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood). I agree with her sentiments and her quotes, which accurately reflect everything I think about the subject.

About five hours ago some questions were raised about taxes and how we use them. I remind Government Members who are not in their seats at present that “taxes are the price we pay for a civilised society”, and that includes education. Education is probably the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world, and we should be mindful of that at all times. That is probably the reason why I and others are here today.

I am thankful to have this platform from which to address these important issues, about which I feel extremely passionately. The opportunity to access education on the journey from childhood to adulthood is crucial in empowering and enabling people. Access to the very best education is of paramount importance, and the best education must be for all. I am therefore deeply saddened by what is tantamount to a betrayal of young people by this Conservative Government as they continually and callously focus their concentration on constructing an education system for those who can pay, not for those who are less financially advantaged but who, as

many Members have said this afternoon, have all the potential to achieve great things, given the opportunity to do so.

I am thankful that education is a devolved and independent matter and that my constituents will benefit from having a Government with progressive attitudes and policies towards education, skills and training. A good education is an investment, not just in a child, but for our economy and for society as a whole. How could it not be? The Scottish Government strive to provide everyone, regardless of their background, with the very best chance of success in life. We do this by investing in high-quality childcare and highly trained staff. We support children during their vital early years and help them to reach their full potential. The Scottish National party and the Scottish Government are determined to raise attainment through the education system and to end decades of educational inequality by tackling the attainment gap in higher education.

The Scottish Government have committed to an ambitious new target that will ensure that by 2030 students from the 20% most deprived areas will make up 20% of higher education entrants. Crucially, as long as the Scottish National party is in government, we will keep university tuition free, ensuring that education is based on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

Helping young people make the transition to adulthood and the world of work is vital, whether a young person chooses university, college, vocational training or employment. It is important that they get the very best opportunity. The Scottish Government are committed to increasing the number of modern apprenticeships each year to 30,000 by 2020.

The appointment of the Deputy First Minister as Education Secretary demonstrates the Scottish Government's commitment to education as a major priority. This exemplifies the dedication that we have in Scotland to build on the achievements already made, keeping education to the fore. However, the Scottish Government's efforts in this regard are undermined by this Conservative Government. The apprenticeship levy introduced by the Conservatives is causing many organisations great concern. I was recently in contact with Forth Valley College in Falkirk, which expects to be liable to pay about £85,000, with no additional support from the Government. The principal has also expressed uncertainty about how the levy will be distributed to organisations in Scotland. This is an ill-thought-out measure, and as the chair of the all-party group on the hair industry, I am concerned about the impact on training and on college access across the UK.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): My hon. Friend will be aware that Colleges Scotland—the organisation that looks after all the colleges in Scotland—recently calculated that £1.9 million will be taken out of the Scottish Government's allocation for further education through the apprenticeship levy. Surely that £1.9 million would be better being retained to make sure that we train apprentices appropriately.

**John Mc Nally:** I could not agree more. We could use that money for a far better purpose.

With that in mind, I turn to the relevant part of the Queen's Speech. I start by reiterating a point that has previously been made: this Queen's Speech is a missed

opportunity for progressive action. Perhaps this Tory Government do not want to admit that they have no idea how to improve the people's lives, or perhaps they simply do not care enough.

Over the last six years we have seen time and time again that the Tories are ideologically wedded to the divisive programme of austerity, and this Queen's Speech delivers more of the same. This Tory Government are forcing a heavy financial burden on working families and students in England, as they continue to allow tuition fees of £9,000; indeed, as we have heard today, it sounds like fees are guaranteed to increase. That policy disheartens those who are not from wealthy backgrounds and discourages them from applying to university.

I respectfully suggest that the Secretary of State for Education should learn more from what we do well in Scotland, where more of the population is educated beyond school years. As has been mentioned, more of our population is tertiary-educated than in any other country, and a higher percentage of young people now leave school for positive destinations than at any other time on record.

Perhaps it is foolish of me to believe that the Government understand that a high-quality education available to all is the most important economic driver for a developed society in the 21st century. They fail to realise that, by restricting access to further education to those who can pay for it or who are willing to take on excessive debt, they are damaging the country for generations to come. There will be fewer graduates and fewer qualified professionals, leading to a loss in innovation and skills.

The Government are at the top of a slippery slope. The failure to invest in the education of all our communities is a failure for the future of the country. I make an appeal to the Secretary of State for Education that goes beyond and above party politics: she needs to reconsider her policy and to base education on the ability to learn, not the ability to pay.

It has been observed:

“‘Tis Education forms the common mind, Just as the Twig is bent, the Tree's inclined.”

It has also been observed:

“No one should be ashamed to admit they are wrong, which is but saying, in other words, that they are wiser today than they were yesterday.”

6.23 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) and to conclude on behalf of the SNP.

There is a phrase in the Queen's Speech that I doubt anyone in this place would disagree with:

“educational excellence in all schools, giving every child the best start in life.”

I have taught in several excellent schools. One in particular that comes to mind is an inner-city comprehensive in Glasgow, where quality shone through. The quality was obvious in the way the school interacted with the wider community, the way former pupils came back to let their teachers know how they were getting on and the way the staff worked as a team to make sure they got the best possible outcomes for their students. It was also a happy place. However, would that school be deemed excellent by Government Members? I doubt it.

There are three main groups of people who make the difference to children's educational chances: the children themselves, their parents and the teachers. At no point did I mention politicians, however, because we now have a situation where the level of political interference is reaching dangerous levels.

Many Members will have visited schools in their constituencies. Like the Queen, they will have been treated to the pristine and polished view. A more enlightening experience, perhaps, would be to go undercover and shadow a teacher for a couple of days. Even though a proficient teacher will make the job look easy, one would still develop a far more informed view of the realities of 21st-century education. I would suggest that Members try their hand at teaching a class of 30 teenagers, but unfortunately most hon. Members in this place would not make it past the morning interval. As legislators, we need to understand why there is both a recruitment and a retention crisis in teaching. We need to listen to the teachers to ensure that we retain these experts in education.

The dangers of the academisation programme may not be immediately obvious. Indeed, to the lay person the programme can seem attractive. No parent wants their child to get a second-class education at a so-called failing school, so transforming these schools magically into beacons of educational brilliance does indeed seem attractive. But we need to call it what it is: this “deregulation” is in fact privatisation by another name. Academies can be judged to be failing or coasting in the same way that local authority schools can be outstanding, so this relentless drive to convert schools to academies is clearly being done for a different reason, and I suggest that it is an ideological attack on state education.

There is plenty of talk about our great teachers—in fact, I have heard it mentioned several times today—but to the teaching profession these words appear hollow. Removing teachers' nationally agreed terms and conditions and abandoning pay scales is ultimately about reducing education spending. These terms and conditions set out the number of hours teachers should work each week and how that time should be split between class contact, preparation time, and continuous professional development activities. Simple things like the requirement to give a teacher a lunch break are included in the conditions, but they also include agreed standards for, for example, sick pay or maternity leave. Firefighters and police officers are not expected to negotiate their pay with the local station, and neither should our teachers. For a beleaguered profession, this is the equivalent of kicking them when they are down.

The deregulation of pay scales has been reported as allowing schools to pay their staff more in order to recruit quality teachers. I am afraid I am sceptical. There is a real danger that by removing standardised pay scales, the opposite will in fact happen, and staff will be paid less. This will further demotivate teachers and lead to the increased use of unqualified teachers. As the largest part of any school budget is for staffing, when this is rolled out nationally the Government's education budget can be eroded right across the country, meaning that education spending would reduce and funding problems currently experienced in schools would be ingrained.

The use of unqualified teachers causes me grave concern. We are talking about people who hold a child's future in their hands. It would be unacceptable to go to

[Carol Monaghan]

the doctor and find that the person sitting in front of you had never been to medical school, so why is this acceptable in teaching? I accept that there are shortages of teachers generally, and specifically in a number of key subject areas. The Government should therefore ask themselves, and ask the teachers, why teaching has become so unattractive, rather than compound the situation with further ham-fisted, ideologically driven interference.

On a number of occasions in this Chamber I have raised concerns about the £35,000 income threshold for non-EU workers. The Government need to look immediately at this ill-thought-out scheme and the impact it is having on the recruitment and retention of overseas teachers in key subject areas, particularly in STEM subjects. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech to tackle shortages in those subjects or to lift the £35,000 threshold.

Excellence is not about groups of pupils leaving school with a narrow clutch of GCSEs in traditional subjects. In Scotland we have a new curriculum for excellence, which allows pupils to work through subject areas with much less constraint than in the past. The drive is not for boffin-like students to rhyme off equations and dates that can be Googled instantly; instead, it is for our young people to be empowered with skills such as analysis, communication and problem solving—in other words, the employability skills for which business is crying out.

I am happy to say that Scotland is a country of bairns not bombs. We are protecting pay scales, terms and conditions, and standards and qualifications for teachers. Unqualified teachers cannot work in our schools.

When the education system in England has been flushed down the toilet of deregulation, those who can afford it will go private, and unequal Britain will be embedded. The UK Government have to ask themselves what value they place—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I call Lucy Powell.

6.30 pm

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): This is the climbdown Queen's Speech or the "as much as we can muster together" Queen's Speech. It is a Queen's Speech so fearful of its own destiny—or should I say demise?—that it seeks hardly any powers at all. Nowhere is that more stark than in its flimsy offerings on education and skills.

The Prime Minister said only a few weeks ago that "academies for all...will be in the Queen's Speech."—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1422.]

Yet the word "academy" did not even appear in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech.

The Government had one big idea for education: to force all schools, against their wishes, to become academies. That has been dropped as quickly as it was unveiled to shore up the Chancellor's lacklustre Budget. There remains a schools Bill, but it is hardly worth the paper it is written on and raises more questions than it answers. If that is the sum total of the new thinking of the first Conservative majority Government in more than 20 years, their education policy is in a very dire state indeed.

In the process, their flip-flopping has wasted the valuable time and energy not just of the Department, which is failing to get the basics right, but of school leaders, parents and teachers around the country, who are in open revolt at the Government's approach.

What a crying shame that after so many years of real progress in education by successive Governments, particularly the last Labour one, this Government are now presiding over a school system in crisis. It is mired by chaos and confusion created by incessant ministerial meddling, and the basics of sufficiency in quality teachers, school places and budgets are woefully lacking. For the first time in a long time, education is right back up there as an issue of public concern.

As we have heard in the excellent speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) and for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi), and by many Conservative Members, there is relief at the Government's decision to U-turn on forced academisation. However, the Government seem to have missed the point of the wide alliance that their plans have forged. It is not simply about the politically inept idea of compelling already good and outstanding schools to become academies against their wishes; it is about wider concerns about the desire for a fully academised system—without the underpinning evidence, capacity or robust oversight and accountability—leading to many more Perry Beeches or E-ACTs. Many of those concerns remain, but the Government have failed to address any of them or to produce any clear evidence. Vague assertions and loose statistics that have no correlation to cause and effect simply will not do.

The evidence remains patchy. Analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers shows that only three of the biggest academy chains got a positive value-added rating and that just one of the 26 biggest primary sponsors achieved results above the national average. In areas where there is still underachievement at GCSE, most or all secondary schools are already academies. The highest-performing part of our school system is in primary, where more than 80% of schools are maintained and rated good or outstanding, and where most of the Education Secretary's 1.4 million good new places have been created. There is simply no evidence that academisation in itself leads to school improvement. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) made many of those points, and my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) made some excellent points about the fragmented and poor planning that the school system creates. That is why we now have a shell of a schools Bill and a Government with absolutely nothing else to say. I ask the Secretary of State again to get the independent analysis, take stock, ensure that best practice—not worst practice—is being spread and develop high-quality chains to take on more schools before seeking more powers to accelerate academisation.

I support the Secretary of State's plans to require maths to be taught until the age of 18. Indeed, I think that that should be extended to English, too. But her ambition will fail completely if she does not take urgent action to tackle the chronic shortage of teachers, particularly in maths.

**Margaret Greenwood:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government's failure to get to grips with the retention of schoolteachers is hurtling us towards crisis?



**Lucy Powell:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's excellent point. The shortage of teachers is the biggest issue facing education today, and the Government have only recently begun to acknowledge that there is a problem.

Cuts to further education will make the Government's agenda more difficult. As the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee pointed out, STEM subjects are critical if we are to compete in the digital, automated new economy. Yet the Government are taking us backwards, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) said in her excellent speech. They must heed warnings from the OECD that the Secretary of State's new maths curriculum is

“a mile wide and an inch deep”

and that it will fail to equip young people with the critical and conceptual thinking required to succeed in the new economy. My former schoolmate in Manchester, my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy), gave an inspiring speech on the future skills needed for the new economy.

One thread of the new legislative programme that the Government just about managed to muster was that of their so-called life chances agenda. Although I and everyone in the House share these aims, the record and reality of this Government fly in the face of that agenda. It is almost laughable. Yes, let us support social workers by lifting the quality and the status of the profession, and let us enable quicker adoption for those who want to give vulnerable children a great start in life. We also welcome the care leavers covenant. But let us not kid ourselves that the context has not got much, much harder. Huge cuts to children's services, the decimation of Sure Start centres and family support services, reduced tax credits, increased housing and childcare costs and a growth in insecure work have put many more families in crisis or on the brink, as has the Government's failure to tackle child poverty, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Rushanara Ali) pointed out. It is no wonder that the attainment gap between the disadvantaged and their peers has widened under this Government. That is the measure of the Government's life chances record.

As we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and others, scrapping maintenance grants and increasing tuition fees will not help the life chances of the disadvantaged either. The failure to prioritise adult skills and 16-to-19 education will not help people to better themselves, as we heard in a very personal speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). Ministers need a reality check if they think that tired rhetoric will turn into results. That point was brilliantly made by my hon. Friend—my good friend—the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman).

The biggest tragedy lies in the measures that the Government could have proposed for this Session. They could have had widespread support for raising life chances. They could have had real powers for local authorities on school place planning, incentives for teacher recruitment and retention, and a childcare strategy focused on quality or real measures to raise standards in our schools. The Secretary of State would have had strong support if, in her discussions with the Chancellor, she had focused on ensuring that schools were properly resourced rather than on forced academisation.

The Secretary of State talks of fair funding, which we support, but she does so in the context of real and significant school budget cuts. If we talk to any headteacher, they will tell us what they are cutting: extracurricular activities, one-to-one tuition, teaching assistants, life-expanding school trips and visits and so on—all the things that should be at the heart of a life chances agenda. I recently visited a school in my constituency, a primary school in Moss Side, that had put on a Shakespeare play at the local theatre, but the headteacher will not be able to arrange that next year because of the budget cuts she faces.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan)**  
*indicated dissent.*

**Lucy Powell:** The right hon. Lady shakes her head, but that is the reality on the ground. I could give her a number of examples of that happening in every part of the country.

The Government could have ensured a robust and consistent testing and assessment framework. Instead, we have seen chaos and confusion—calamity after calamity on SATs with baseline testing being abandoned, and new and radically different GCSEs still not ready just weeks before they are due to begin. Today's kids are guinea pigs for the Government's chaotic experiments. In every other public sphere, Ministers are championing devolution, yet in education they are going in the opposite direction.

**Margaret Greenwood:** My hon. Friend is being very generous with her time. Does she agree with a point put to me on Friday by a senior police officer on Merseyside that the Government are failing to provide an education that develops our children, particularly those who are not going to gain high academic qualifications, and that that is spilling over in the creation of lots of problems for our police and social services?

**Lucy Powell:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the narrowing of the curriculum that we have seen under this Government.

This week's IPPR North report warns of the growing regional divide. As my hon. Friends the Members for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) and for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) highlighted, Ministers cannot build a northern powerhouse or a midlands engine of growth if they take away the levers that communities are using to tackle the deep-rooted causes of low attainment. However, the real headline of the report is just how well London has done. Why is that? It is—to name but a few reasons—because of the London challenge, significant resources and the development of a pool of world-class teachers. The Government seem to be ignoring all those lessons. Indeed, they are putting such achievements at risk by taking away further resources.

This is a programme from a Government who are unable to persuade even their own Members of the merits of their proposals, who are out of ideas for schools and education and who talk of improved life chances but whose actions make life much harder for those with the least. The Government's education record has been one of structural change at the expense of standards, chronic teacher shortages, a schools places crisis, falling budgets and assessment in complete and utter meltdown. Their own record is now coming home to roost, and on it they will be judged.

6.42 pm

**The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan):**

This has been an excellent debate. I estimate that 31 Members from all parts of the House have spoken, raising a variety of different subjects. One thing on which we can all agree is that everybody has an interest—a passionate interest—in education. It is an honour for me to close this debate, and I thank Members who have spoken for their insightful contributions.

It is clear from the speech by the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) that when it comes to education, the differences between us and the Labour party are stark. While we take the side of parents, pupils and students, the Labour party backs stagnation and decline. The hon. Lady cannot even get her basic facts right: the attainment gap has narrowed at both key stage 2 and key stage 4 since 2011, meaning better prospects and a more prosperous life as an adult for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Since 2010, this Government have been relentless in our pursuit of educational excellence at all ages. I note that the hon. Lady did not even mention the Higher Education and Research Bill in her concluding remarks. We have worked to secure the economy, guarantee prosperity and deliver social justice. The Gracious Speech is a continuation of that approach. As many speakers have picked out, we are particularly focusing on opportunity for all.

**Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): On Friday, I visited Oliver's Battery Primary School in my constituency, which was the last school in my constituency to be neither good nor outstanding. Today, Hampshire County Council has told me that every single school in my constituency is now good or outstanding. That has been achieved through the hard work of the teachers, the parents, the governors and the young people, and that is what education reform is doing in my constituency.

**Nicky Morgan:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I am delighted and pleased—perhaps he will pass on my congratulations to the school he mentioned on its recent Ofsted report. We want the opportunities that schoolchildren in his constituency have to be available to all children, right the way across the country. That is why the White Paper talks about “achieving excellence” areas.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State have any words for the school my children go to, where class sizes are currently increasing from 30 to 32? The notification I have had this week is that my children are now going to have more children in their classes, and their teachers will be stretched. Would she like to say anything to their school?

**Nicky Morgan:** We have created 600,000 new school places since 2010. The hon. Lady will know—everyone does—that the most important thing is to have the best quality teachers in the classroom in front of pupils, inspiring that next generation.

I will turn to the remarks made by Members on all sides of the House. The Chairman of the Education Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), welcomed the care leavers covenant. He discussed illegal and unregistered schools. Sadly,

that situation has been going on for far too long. We now have a new Ofsted team leading investigations and preparing cases for prosecution, but more needs to be done, which is why we have talked about regulating out-of-school settings. We will come back to Members with proposals on that after the consultation. I will return to his comments about the consultation on the education for all Bill later in my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr Syms) set out his track record on referendum votes. That has not been too successful, but we can all agree that, whatever we think about the current referendum debate, this Government have delivered on giving the British people an in/out vote on our EU membership on 23 June. He was the first person to talk about support for the new national funding formula. I am grateful to him and other hon. Members who mentioned that.

In a very personal speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) spoke about her experiences, saying that what matters is not where you come from but where you are going to. That is absolutely right, and a view we would all subscribe to. She supports the national funding formula. The Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), talked about the Chancellor's recognising the importance of funding science even in a time of austerity.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—I cannot see whether he is in his place—called the Queen's Speech a Milk Tray of hard and soft centres, and a smorgasbord of delights. He certainly has a way with words. My hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Michelle Donelan), who talked about her support for the national funding formula, kindly invited me to make a visit on 5 July. I will have to look at my diary, but I very much enjoyed my last visit to Chippenham schools with her last year. She also talked about the links between schools and businesses, and we are of course backing the Careers and Enterprise Company, which offers exactly those sorts of opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) talked about her support for the National Citizen Service. I am sure that, like many others, she will welcome the Bill in the Queen's Speech to put the NCS on a statutory footing. We are also going to make sure that it can be promoted in schools, to make sure young people get the opportunities she talked about. My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies) talked about the Wales Bill. I have to say that I have not been involved in its drafting or the debates about it, but I am sure that his remarks will have been heeded.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) talked about the Higher Education and Research Bill, welcoming the establishment of new universities, which she hopes will particularly benefit her part of the country. She offered her support for the national funding formula. She also admitted that we have invented some new words in the past few weeks. For the benefit of the Minister for Schools, we have invented the verb “to academise”, along with the noun “academisation”. I look forward to those words being added to the next edition of the dictionary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) talked about early years provision. I encourage her and interested

people in her constituency to take part in the early years national funding formula consultation when it is published shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) talked about the better markets Bill and the problems in her own constituency. She may be interested to know that the Government today published a call for evidence seeking to establish whether there are any problems with the provision of advice, advocacy and dispute resolution in the regulated sectors, including water, to help us develop that better markets Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) also welcomed the national funding formula. She mentioned, as did other hon. Members, her concerns about young people's mental health. She is absolutely right to identify that issue. The Department has done a lot of work on that. The Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), who has responsibility for childcare, has worked on peer support schemes, on counselling in schools and on school pilot projects on child and adolescent mental health services, but we know we can go further.

**Mr Anderson rose—**

**Nicky Morgan:** I will get to the hon. Gentleman's speech in a moment [*Interruption.*] I am glad that he wants to listen to my remarks.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (Danny Kinahan) rightly said that we should learn from each other, and perhaps through him I can welcome the new Unionist Minister, Peter Weir, to his place in the Northern Ireland Assembly. The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) asked where the evidence was, and I encourage him to read the discussions of the Education Committee about international evidence. Several SNP Members spoke about the new Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in the Scottish Government. I spoke to John Swinney on Monday, and hope that we can work together, particularly on the 2017 international teaching summit that Scotland is hosting. I hope that all Administrations will take part in that.

**Neil Gray:** I assume that the Minister will be keen to retain as many skilled graduates as possible. Will she commit to working with the SNP, and the new Cabinet Secretary and Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, and approach the Home Secretary about the reintroduction of the post-study work visa?

**Nicky Morgan:** I heard the hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks to the Minister. We have one of the most successful university sectors in the world, of which people from overseas rightly take advantage, and it is incumbent on us to ensure a robust visa and border policy. The number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who go to universities in Scotland is almost half—[*Interruption.*] Deprived young people in Scotland are almost half as likely to attend university as their peers in England.

The right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) spoke about multi-academy trusts, and we debated that. He will have noticed the item in the White Paper on multi-academy trust accountability, which says that we will launch new accounting measures for MATs, and publish MAT performance tables in addition to the continued publication of performance at individual school level.

**Stephen Timms:** The Secretary of State spoke in the Education Committee about allowing parents to initiate the process of changing from one trust to another if things go wrong with the original trust. Will that provision be in the Bill?

**Nicky Morgan:** We are considering that, and we want to take soundings and consult on exactly how it would work. We would not want to destabilise trusts, but the views of parents are critical on that issue.

The hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) spoke about part-time students, and will no doubt have welcomed the announcement last year that for the first time ever we will provide financial support to part-time students that is equivalent to the support we give full-time students. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) spoke about English devolution, and the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) spoke about north-south funding. I am sure she will welcome the national funding formula, and take part in the next stage of the consultation.

The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) spoke about the changing world and robots. I wondered if she was suggesting that that might be the next leader of her party, but she was actually talking about new enterprise. The hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) spoke about the pothole fund, and I point her to the £250 million that has been announced. A number of hon. Members rightly mentioned the importance of the further education sector, but they overlooked the continuing investment in the pupil premium fund.

**Mr Anderson** Will the Secretary of State give way?

**Nicky Morgan:** No, I want to make this point. We are committed to the further education sector, and the education for all Bill will include measures to reform technical education and improve qualifications so that that is employer-led, and prepares students in further education for skilled and valued employment. The hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) mentioned the university technical college, and she will meet the Minister tomorrow. She said that that was not proved financially viable due to poor pupil recruitment. I think I have dealt with all the points raised by hon. Members. The hon. Members for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) also spoke about their commitment to education.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Universities and Science opened the debate by outlining measures to secure the future success of our world-leading higher education system. The Higher Education and Research Bill will inject dynamism and innovation into the system, making it easier for new, high-quality providers to enter the market, giving students more choice and unprecedented transparency on data and information, so that they can make informed decisions about where and what to study. The Bill will raise teaching standards through the teaching excellence framework. In the face of doom-mongering by Labour Members, I remind the House about their record on predictions about higher education: they were wrong about the impact of fees on participation rates and wrong about the impact on disadvantaged pupils.



[Nicky Morgan]

Let me turn to the children and social work Bill. We must expect the same for children in care as we do for our own children: the same aspirations, the same opportunities and the same hope. The Bill will continue the Government's determination to transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children, giving them the stability to succeed. It includes measures to strengthen adoption and to ensure that those charged with making decisions in the interests of children always take into account a child's need for stability. It will introduce new ways to drive innovation in local authorities, enable us to continue our drive to raise the status and standards of social workers, and include a set of corporate parenting principles and a requirement for local authorities to publish a local offer for care leavers, setting out what support they can expect and giving them the right to a personal adviser until the age of 25.

The education for all Bill continues our drive for excellence to exist everywhere in our education system, moving further towards a school-led system, with heads, teachers and parents in the driving seat. Schools are embracing the opportunities already available, with record numbers applying to convert to academy status in March and hundreds of underperforming schools set to be turned around by strong sponsors. The Bill shifts responsibility for school improvement away from local authorities towards great school leaders who will be able to spread their reach, ensuring more pupils benefit from their proven records of success.

Following careful consultation, which I hope will include the Education Committee, we will have robust criteria for identifying local authorities that are chronically underperforming or which no longer have the resources to maintain their remaining schools. The education for all Bill will allow us to convert all their remaining schools, including those that are good or outstanding.

The Bill will make sure excellence exists, too, for excluded pupils. Exclusion will no longer be a mechanism by which schools can deem them out of sight and out of mind. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, schools will be responsible for the continued education of excluded pupils; charged with finding them the right providers; able to give them the education they deserve; and incentivised to do their best for them by being accountable for their educational achievement.

It cannot be fair that a child in one part of the country can attract, in some cases, thousands of pounds more in funding to their school than a child with the same characteristics and costs who happens to live elsewhere. The education for all Bill will consign the antiquated school funding system to the history books, replacing it with a national funding formula that will give schools their fair share of funding to give every child the education they deserve.

The Minister for Skills will shortly launch the Government's skills plan, our strategy to revolutionise the skills system that has hitherto been a minefield of training and qualifications. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, we will introduce legislation to strengthen careers advice, requiring schools to give education and training providers the opportunity to reach young people on school premises.

It is telling that the Labour party would rather leave schools in the hands of underperforming and unviable local authorities based on opposition to school freedom. It is no wonder the leader of the NUT's first act after stepping down was to join the Labour party. I cannot understand why the Labour party continues to draw a false distinction between structures and standards. Of course standards are paramount. The quality of teaching is the most important thing we can do to make sure education is life-transforming. But the Government believe that if we want high standards, teachers have to lead the structures. If we want educational excellence everywhere, we have to identify those parts of the country where the educational underperformance is entrenched and focus on it. We will look at all those things. As the Minister for Universities and Science said, the White Paper has one chapter on structures and seven chapters on teaching, leadership, funding, standards and qualifications.

Unlike the Labour party, the Government believe in opportunity and aspiration. More importantly, we will take the steps and seek the measures to support excellence in our schools, to support and enhance our world class universities, and to make sure we procure the best life chances for children in the care system. For Conservative Members, children, students and parents—

**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 accordingly*, That the amendment be made.

*The House divided*: Ayes 263, Noes 300.

**Division No. 1]**

**[6.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Burgon, Richard
Abrahams, Debbie	Burnham, rh Andy
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Butler, Dawn
Alexander, Heidi	Byrne, rh Liam
Ali, Rushanara	Cadbury, Ruth
Allen, Mr Graham	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Anderson, Mr David	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Arkless, Richard	Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Ashworth, Jonathan	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Austin, Ian	Champion, Sarah
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Chapman, Douglas
Barron, rh Kevin	Chapman, Jenny
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cherry, Joanna
Berger, Luciana	Clwyd, rh Ann
Betts, Mr Clive	Coaker, Vernon
Black, Mhairi	Coffey, Ann
Blackford, Ian	Cooper, Julie
Blackman, Kirsty	Cooper, Rosie
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blenkinsop, Tom	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Blomfield, Paul	Cowan, Ronnie
Boswell, Philip	Cox, Jo
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Coyle, Neil
Brake, rh Tom	Crausby, Mr David
Brennan, Kevin	Crawley, Angela
Brock, Deidre	Creagh, Mary
Brown, Alan	Creasy, Stella
Brown, Lyn	Cruddas, Jon
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cryer, John
Buck, Ms Karen	Cummins, Judith

Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 Danczuk, Simon  
 Davies, Geraint  
 Day, Martyn  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin  
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Jim  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dromey, Jack  
 Dugher, Michael  
 Durkan, Mark  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Edwards, Jonathan  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Fellows, Marion  
 Ferrier, Margaret  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Ffello, Robert  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Gibson, Patricia  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Grady, Patrick  
 Grant, Peter  
 Gray, Neil  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hendry, Drew  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Hosie, Stewart  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen

Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kerevan, George  
 Kerr, Calum  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Law, Chris  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 Mc Nally, John  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCaig, Callum  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm  
 McDonald, Stuart C.  
 McDonnell, John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGarry, Natalie  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McLaughlin, Anne  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Monaghan, Carol  
 Monaghan, Dr Paul  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Mullin, Roger  
 Murray, Ian  
 Newlands, Gavin  
 Nicolson, John  
 O'Hara, Brendan  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Oswald, Kirsten  
 Paterson, Steven  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Pugh, John  
 Qureshi, Yasmin  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Jamie  
 Reed, Mr Steve

Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robertson, rh Angus  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Salmond, rh Alex  
 Saville Roberts, Liz  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sheppard, Tommy  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaughter, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stephens, Chris  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela

Tami, Mark  
 Thewliss, Alison  
 Thomas, Mr Gareth  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thompson, Owen  
 Thomson, Michelle  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Weir, Mike  
 West, Catherine  
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Whitford, Dr Philippa  
 Williams, Hywel  
 Williams, Mr Mark  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Wishart, Pete  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

Sue Hayman and  
 Vicky Foxcroft

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishty, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Glen, John  
 Goldsmith, Zac  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 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  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth

Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Osborne, rh Mr George  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Phillips, Stephen  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Poulter, Dr Daniel

Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Redwood, rh John  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 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, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 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  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Jackie Doyle-Price and  
 Guy Opperman

*Question accordingly negated.*

7.14 pm

*The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*  
*Ordered, That the debate be resumed tomorrow.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 2 to 4 together.

*Ordered,*

That the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) Order 2016 (S.I., 2016, No. 332), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.

That the School Governance (Constitution and Federations) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2016 (S.I., 2016, No. 204), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.

That the Feed-in Tariffs (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2015 (S.I., 2015, No. 2045), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)



## PETITION

**Development on the former Two Trees High School site, Denton**

7.14 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I rise to present the petition that has been collected by my constituent, Margaret Smethurst, following my Adjournment debate on 26 February concerning planning issues relating to the Haughton Green area of my constituency. The petition has 167 signatures. It is accompanied by an online Change.org petition that has 1,338 signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Haughton Green and Denton,

Declares that the fields of the former Two Trees High School in Denton should be protected from unwanted development; and further that the site should be preserved for the benefit of the environment and future generations.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretaries of State for Education and Communities and Local Government to protect Haughton Green and Denton's open spaces, and prohibit unwanted development on the former site of Two Trees High School.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001697]

**Battle of Jutland Centenary**

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

7.16 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to invite the House to pay its respects to those who fought at the battle of Jutland on 31 May and 1 June 100 years ago. At 10.30 pm on 30 May 1916, Admiral Jellicoe led 16 Dreadnought battle ships out of Scapa Flow after the Admiralty had intercepted a message suggesting that the German fleet was mobilising. He was to meet a squadron of eight Dreadnoughts coming from Cromarty to form the grand fleet. Admiral Beatty's battle cruiser fleet comprising 52 ships left Rosyth a little later. In total, 151 ships of the Royal Navy were to rendezvous 90 miles west of Jutland.

At 1 am on 31 May, Admiral Hipper's battle cruisers left Wilhelmshaven. The German main battle fleet of 16 Dreadnought class ships led by Admiral Scheer left Jade at 2.30 am and were joined by six pre-Dreadnought ships from the Elbe river at 4 am, giving a total of 99 ships in the German high seas fleet. Neither side knew that the other's entire force was at sea. On 31 May at 3.48 pm, five of Admiral Hipper's ships opened fire on the battlecruisers of Admiral Beatty. Within 36 minutes, the British fleet had lost two battlecruisers, HMS Indefatigable and HMS Queen Mary, with the loss of 2,264 men and boys, and just 21 survivors.

**Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Is my hon. Friend aware that my grandfather served on HMS Valiant as a gunnery officer during the battle of Jutland? I shall be reading out his letters during a presentation in Devonport in Plymouth on Monday. The adrenalin that went through his body at the time meant that he did not need to eat anything for 36 hours after playing his part in the battle. He enjoyed only a glass of sloe gin and a ham sandwich during the course of it.

**Mrs Drummond:** The normal ration is rum, of course. I ask my hon. Friend to send those letters to the Royal Naval Museum in Portsmouth; I am sure that it would be very grateful to him. HMS Valiant, on which his grandfather served, also had a distinguished career in world war two, when it served in the Mediterranean and the far east.

Within 12 hours, the Royal Navy had lost 14 ships and more than 6,000 men while the German navy lost 11 ships and 2,500 men. The total was 10% of the number of ships at battle. The conditions in which the battle was fought were foggy and damp with a freezing North sea that claimed the lives of many of those who managed to abandon their shattered ships. Those lives are remembered at the manning ports of Portsmouth, Plymouth and Chatham, where the memorials designed by Sir Robert Lorimer bear plaques carrying all their names.

The biggest ships fired shells weighing nearly a tonne over a distance of 12 miles. Conditions aboard ships on both sides would have been uncomfortable and cramped at the best of times.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for bringing the matter to the House for consideration. HMS *Caroline*, which has been undergoing restoration while docked in Belfast harbour, saw action at the battle of Jutland. The strong links and bonds between our great nations are exemplified by our shared history and experiences. Given the number of approaching centenaries, does she agree that now is an opportune moment to ensure that we link all our common experiences and see Britishness come roaring back?

**Mrs Drummond:** Absolutely. HMS *Caroline* has just received a large sum of Heritage Lottery Fund money for its restoration and the site is opening next week.

In battle, the confusion and strain must have been immense as ships manoeuvred at high speed as they shot shattering broadsides and received hammering hits from enemy guns. Below deck, the men would have been working in extreme heat in the boiler rooms or in the gun turrets with a sense of helplessness at influencing all that was going on around them. A single hit to a ship's magazine could blow both ship and crew to pieces. One such tragedy sunk HMS *Invincible* in 90 seconds with the loss of more than 1,000 lives.

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this debate to the House. Given the significance of the battle of the Somme in 1916, I often think that Jutland's strategic significance gets overlooked.

When going through my late grandfather's records, I realised that he was in the Royal Navy from 1908 to 1922 and served on HMS *Orion*, the first of the super-Dreadnoughts. I was going to say that he played a minor role, but it was actually quite significant. HMS *Orion* managed four hits on the German battlecruiser *Lützow*, which had earlier nearly sunk Admiral Beatty's flagship.

**Mrs Drummond:** The hon. Gentleman may like to know that HMS *Orion* was made in Portsmouth, so that is another link.

The loss of life on the ships was largely due to keeping cordite close to the turrets so that it could be brought up quickly to enable faster firing. There was also confusion among the highest ranking officers of both the German and Royal Navy fleets. Admiral Scheer, in command of the German fleet, did not know that Jellicoe was at sea until his ships appeared on the horizon. Although wireless technology was widely available, it was used sparingly as it gave the transmitter's position away to the enemy, so flags and search lights were the main means by which ship-to-ship communications were conducted. In the smoke, the spray and poor visibility, signals were not received, so small cruisers were placed between the larger battleships to pass on the messages.

It is testament to the trying circumstances that four Victoria Crosses were given to sailors and Royal Marines for the action, and perhaps more should have been awarded. The first was given to Jack Cornwell, or Boy Cornwell as he was known, who stuck to his task as a sight-setter of a 5.5-inch gun on HMS *Chester*. All his colleagues had been killed or mortally wounded. He was just 16 and a child like many others in the grand fleet. Boy Cornwell's example was reproduced on posters hung in classrooms as an example to others, although

his devotion and bravery was far from unique in the fleet at Jutland. Sir Edward Carson, First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote:

"I feel that Jack Cornwell, the boy who met his death at the post of duty, sends this message through me...to the Empire: 'Obey your orders. Cling to your post. Don't grumble. Stick it out.'"

The second VC was awarded to Major Francis Harvey, a former pupil of Portsmouth Grammar School and a Royal Marine serving on HMS *Lion*. He ordered the flooding of the magazine of Q turret to prevent an explosion, thereby saving the ship.

Rear Admiral Barry Bingham was awarded the third VC as captain of HMS *Nestor*. The destroyer had to close right up to enemy battleships to fire its torpedoes, a task which it completed despite being hit numerous times and eventually sinking.

The fourth VC was awarded to Commander Loftus Jones, from Petersfield near Portsmouth. He was captain of HMS *Shark* and literally fought to the end, manning the last gun on his ship capable of firing. The lifejacket that he wore in the freezing North sea is now on display in the superb exhibition about the battle of Jutland at the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth. His body was washed up on the shores of Sweden, where he received a Viking burial.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and on the support that I know she gives to the naval historic dockyard in Portsmouth. I know she has seen this already, but I commend her on the wonderful exhibition "36 Hours: Jutland 1916, The Battle That Won The War", which all right hon. and hon. Members should see. It is open for three years.

**Mrs Drummond:** I am incredibly lucky to have it in my constituency, and I urge all Members to visit it.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD) *rose—*

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) *rose—*

**Mrs Drummond:** I will take one last intervention, from the right hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael:** The hon. Lady is being remarkably generous in giving way, in a remarkably well attended Adjournment debate. She will know that next week Orkney will be at the heart of the events to commemorate this remarkable episode in our nation's history, just as we were at the heart of events 100 years ago, when Jellicoe led the fleet from Scapa Flow. I am struck by the range of interventions we have had from Members from right across the country, and it strikes me that what we will be commemorating is not just a memorable naval battle, but an enterprise involving communities right across the length and breadth of this country. That is the spirit in which it should be remembered.

**Mrs Drummond:** Absolutely. I do not think there is a single place that has not contributed to the Royal Navy at some time.

Jutland has always been a difficult battle for lay people to understand, because of the chaos of a naval action in poor visibility and darkness. Despite a massive toll of injury and death, the true impact of the battle

was not understood at home, even immediately afterwards. There were some early interpretations of the outcome as a German victory, followed by an understanding that it was in fact a strategic defeat of Germany. Exactly a month later, the horrors of the Somme brought a fresh wave of shock to the population. Although we are here now to commemorate the centenary of the battle, it has spent most of the past 100 years lurking in the shadows of our national consciousness, yet the impact on my city of Portsmouth was profound. Portsmouth provided a major part of the crews of the biggest ships in the fleet. In Portsmouth's manned ships we lost 3,000 lives in the battle of Jutland, more than we lost at the Somme. The impact of Jutland on families and communities in the city was huge.

The battle of Jutland jerked the Royal Navy out of Victorian complacency about its leadership. It had led the way with the building of Dreadnought and its successors at the insistence of Admiral Jacky Fisher, but over that period, and for long before it, the leadership of the Navy had fossilised ideas and played down the importance of initiative; it was constricted by the Victorian class structure.

**Richard Benyon** (Newbury) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs Drummond:** I am unable to, as I do not have much time. At Jutland, there were various examples of squadron commanders failing to act on their own initiative and a conservatism in the standing orders of the fleet, which were based on the outmoded premises of the Victorian era. There was an automatic assumption by almost everyone that the commander on the flagship must already be aware of what they saw. There was a reluctance to break wireless silence at night when important developments occurred. Generally, there was a disinclination to act and an eagerness to defer to authority—all those things are seen as the inevitable outcome of the structured rationalist certainties of the late Victorian fleet. By the prescriptive, centralising premises on which his elaborate battle orders were based, Jellicoe had acted correctly—but they were the premises of the Victorian era. Arthur Marder, writing in 1966, described the Royal Navy of the turn of the 20th century as follows:

“though numerically a very imposing force, it was in certain respects a drowsy, inefficient, moth-eaten organism”.

On the other side, the Germans had a technical and tactical understanding among their commanding officers that surpassed ours. The German navy arguably came into being as a distinct separate organisation only in 1888—indeed, most of its ships were named after Prussian soldiers. Alfred von Tirpitz became chief of staff to the German navy's high command at the age of 48, after being a specialist in torpedoes and mines. He recognised that the torpedo could be as vital as the gun, and ensured that tactical exercises replaced formal manoeuvres. The Germans practised a manoeuvre called “battle turnaround”, which was a simultaneous turnaround for all ships in the convoy, rather than the turn in succession. It made it easier to escape bombardment, and this was so successful at Jutland. Every encouragement was given to German subordinate officers to act on their own initiative whenever they could better further their commanding officer's intentions, rather than have rigid compliance with orders. Admiral von Tirpitz was instrumental in

the appointment of Admiral Scheer as head of the German high seas fleet who, likewise, was a torpedo specialist. Although it is not quite as true of the Royal Navy as it was of the Army in world war one that they were “lions led by donkeys”, there were clear deficiencies, and it is to the credit of the Royal Navy that they rapidly learned the lessons.

If we are to be critical of naval leadership, we should, at the same time, remember the burdens that fell on Admiral Jellicoe. He had, at all costs, to avoid a major defeat. In fact, he showed the Germans that the Royal Navy, even at the huge cost of life at Jutland, had the strength to fight battles on that scale repeatedly while they did not.

The lead that we built up in the Dreadnought race before the war was simply too great. The consequences of Jutland were that our naval supremacy on the surface remained unchallengeable. Germany largely kept its surface fleet in port and resorted to the unrestricted submarine warfare that eventually brought the United States into the war and doomed Germany. Jellicoe and Beatty led a Navy that stuck to its tasks and bravely undertook its duties despite horrendous hardships.

We find ourselves now in a new era of development, with two new aircraft carriers shortly to enter service; the introduction of the excellent Astute-class submarines, and a clear plan for renewing the nuclear deterrent. There is no doubt that, technically, our Navy is at the forefront of technology and doctrine.

However, it is not enough for us in this House to allow the Royal Navy to acquire the most up-to-date equipment if it is to rest idle in the docks in Portsmouth, Plymouth or Faslane. We must provide the resources to enable the Navy to recruit and retain a highly motivated team. We must provide them with the resources to work out the best way to utilise the equipment to enable them to develop tactics.

Today it is tempting to believe that, with the internet, satellite communications, and video-stream links, we can have centralised systems and that, just like Jellicoe, we can control those people in the field. However, just like at Jutland, there could be a misplaced assumption by those in the field that those in the centre already know what is going on.

In the battle of Jutland, there was one flag signal every 67 seconds. In the Falklands, HMS Hermes handled 170,000 signals in 10 weeks, or one every 39 seconds. Too much signalling can lead to information overload. It can also centralise decision making and stultify initiative.

In times of peace, the value of experience fades and is replaced by rational theory as a result of new technology discrediting previous experience. We might do well to remind ourselves of the quote from Sun Tzu, the Chinese general who wrote some 2,500 years ago:

“The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting”.

That encapsulates the object of our strategy of deterrence, and so we must demonstrate to all our potential enemies that not only do we have the most up-to-date equipment, but we also know how to use it.

The people who have served in our forces in the past, now, and who will serve in the future must always be at the centre of our thoughts. At this time of year, our forces have fought crucial battles in other wars besides world war one. On this day in May 1941, the fleet led by



[Mrs Drummond]

Admiral Cunningham, supported by my father-in-law, on HMS Hereward, began the evacuation of Crete, one of the Navy's grimmest tasks but one it carried out with devotion and sacrifice.

Thirty four years ago, all three services were fighting 8,000 miles away to liberate the Falklands. Today, 25 May, is the anniversary of the sinking of HMS Coventry. A total of 19 of her crew were lost and a further 39 were injured. Our hearts go out to the friends and relations of those who were killed in that battle.

Most of us in this House were alive during the Falklands war, and it is through our memory of that conflict, including that of the fate of HMS Coventry, that we have a greater understanding of the shock suffered by the nation after the battle of Jutland. Likewise, it is through the people we know who fought in that battle that we have some understanding of what it must have been like at Jutland as bombs and missiles hit magazines in those ships too.

While we have enjoyed decades of peace in Europe, around the world our service personnel have been in action in difficult circumstances, and suffered injury and death. We must listen to their experiences and keep on learning the lessons that they can teach us. I am proud of the thinking behind the armed forces covenant, but there is still more that we can do to ingrain it in how public services support veterans and those still serving.

There are always lessons to learn in victory or defeat, or in between. Jutland was a victory, although it did not resemble the second Trafalgar that public opinion had become conditioned to look for. Beatty said during the battle:

"There is something wrong with our bloody ships and something wrong with the system".

Within a year, the standing orders of the fleet were updated to encourage initiative and the taking of responsibility by junior commanders.

Among the crews at Jutland in junior positions there were no fewer than eight future First Sea Lords, and there is no question that the Navy went into the second world war better led as a result of the lessons learned in 1916. Admiral Sandy Woodward wrote in 1996:

"The Navy had to rediscover from bitter experience of 1914-16 much about warfare which it should never have forgotten".

The differences of opinion about Jellicoe and Beatty were settled before they both died. The country honoured both men with burials in St Paul's cathedral and busts in Trafalgar Square near Lord Nelson, thus recognising their huge contribution to the security of this country.

It has always been the nature of the Royal Navy that it recruits from all over the country, inland as well as from the historic ports, and every village and town will have made its contribution to the work of the Navy at some time. But it is an honour as the Member of Parliament for Portsmouth South to commemorate the lives of all those who fought at Jutland, and let us be thankful that a repeat of such conflict between the nations of Europe today seems so unthinkable.

7.35 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr David Evennett):** I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth

South (Mrs Drummond) on securing this important debate about the centenary of the battle of Jutland, which we commemorate next week. I commend her for her interesting and informative speech about the battle, the people and the lessons and consequences for the Royal Navy.

I am grateful for the interventions that we have had, and to the Minister for the Armed Forces, my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth North (Penny Mordaunt) for being on the Bench to support this important debate.

The commemoration of the battle of Jutland is just one of the national events in the four-year first world war centenary programme announced by the Prime Minister in 2012. We have already held national events to mark the centenary of Britain's entry into the war in August 2014, the Gallipoli campaign in April 2015, and later this year in July, we will mark the start of the battle of the Somme.

**Neil Gray:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Evennett:** In a moment. I shall make a little progress first.

Tonight and next week our focus moves from the battlefields to the sea. Jutland was one of the largest naval actions in history and the most decisive sea battle of the first world war. It was fought by the British Royal Navy's grand fleet under Admiral Sir John Jellicoe and the imperial German navy's high seas fleet under Vice-Admiral Reinhard Scheer. It took place from 31 May to 1 June 1916 in the North sea. More than 8,500 lives were lost, with many bodies never being recovered in what was the only major naval confrontation of the first world war.

The commemorations of this naval clash, which brought together 250 warships and over 100,000 men, provides an opportunity to remember the contributions of all those involved in the conflict and the battle's important role in the allied victory in the first world war. We will also reflect on the reconciliation with Germany and the peaceful relationship we have today.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Evennett:** I will give way in a moment, but time is very short.

As well as Jutland itself, we will be commemorating the wider war at sea and the huge role of the Royal Navy, the Merchant Navy, the fishing fleets, the shipbuilders and the contribution of all those who served or contributed. Their work and service we remember with pride and gratitude.

Next week on 31 May, my Department, together with partners including the Royal Navy, the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, will deliver national commemorative events in Orkney. The British grand fleet was based in the sheltered anchorage of Scapa Flow in the Orkney Islands during the first world war and the local community played an important role in supporting the war efforts. It is only right, therefore, that 100 years later, we hold commemorations in a place that has profound resonance with the Navy and other maritime organisations. I would like to acknowledge

the help and support that the Orkney Islands Council, local organisations and the community have given over the past year during the planning of these events. Their work has been much appreciated and we thank them.

**Neil Gray:** I thank the Minister for giving way and I congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), my colleague on the women and work all-party parliamentary group, on bringing this important debate to the House, and I thank the Minister and the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for acknowledging the central role that my native Orkney had in the battle of Jutland. Is the Minister aware of the fantastic display of poppies formerly at the Tower of London, now at the iconic St Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall—the weeping window—and what a fitting tribute that is to the battle of Jutland 100 years ago?

**Mr Evennett:** I certainly endorse that point, and I was coming to it in a moment, but the hon. Gentleman has beaten me to it.

The national events will take place at St Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall—the UK’s most northerly cathedral, which was founded in the 12th century—and at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s royal naval cemetery at Lyness, on the isle of Hoy, which was founded in 1915, when Scapa Flow was the base of the grand fleet. The cemetery contains 445 Commonwealth burials of the first world war, 109 of which are unidentified. In the spirit of reconciliation, there will also be a wreath-laying event at sea at Jutland Bank, with the Royal Navy and the federal German navy taking part.

For those in Kirkwall not attending the cathedral service, there will be an opportunity for the general public to gather on the streets to watch the events live on a big screen. The event will be broadcast live on the BBC.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Evennett:** Unfortunately, I really do not have much time.

I am really pleased that around 800 guests will attend the events in Orkney. I look forward to being present myself next Tuesday, as one of the 300 descendants attending. My grandfather, Clyde Turner, served on HMS Malaya during the battle, and I have a strong personal association with the commemoration. He often spoke about his experiences as a stoker and subsequently as a chief petty officer. He was a career naval man and a real influence on me in my early years. I shall, of course, be thinking of him and remembering the time spent with him. In his memory, my son Tom and my grandson George were given the name Clyde as one of their Christian names. I am pleased, therefore, to be the Minister responsible for the first world war centenary at this time, and I look forward to meeting other descendants at the commemoration next week.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): As the granddaughter of a chief petty officer who served at the same time, I commend the Minister’s words. Will he join me in commending Glasgow University professor of naval architecture, Sir John Harvard Biles, on his contribution to the design of the Dreadnought class of warship, which was so vital in the battle of Jutland?

**Mr Evennett:** I would be delighted to endorse that comment, which is so important.

Memories are important, and it is also important that schoolchildren and students learn about the battle of Jutland and about those who served their country. Commemorative events will take place across the UK, including on 28 May at Queensferry cemetery in West Lothian. There will also be events led by the Royal Navy on 31 May at Chatham, Plymouth and the Portsmouth naval memorial, which I understand my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South will attend. Events will also be held at Commonwealth War Graves Commission sites at Esbjerg new cemetery in Denmark, Fredrikstad military cemetery in Norway and Kviberg cemetery in Sweden.

Our key themes across the first world war centenary programme are remembrance, youth and education, and I am delighted that there are a number of resources for children, young people and adults alike so that they can learn about the battle on websites such as those of the Imperial War Museum and the BBC.

A number of key Jutland exhibitions are also taking place. Last week, the National Museum of the Royal Navy in Portsmouth opened the exhibition my hon. Friend told us about—“36 Hours: Jutland 1916, The Battle That Won The War”. In London, the National Maritime Museum opened its new gallery, “Jutland 1916: WWI’s Greatest Sea Battle”. I would encourage as many people as possible and particularly families—perhaps during half-term next week—to visit those exhibitions to learn more about the battle.

**Brendan O’Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank the Minister for giving way—he has been very generous. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) on her marvellous contribution. Will the Minister join me in congratulating the people of my constituency, and particularly of the town of Helensburgh, near Faslane, who turned out in such fantastic numbers just last week, along with members of our armed forces, our cadets and our veterans associations, to remember the battle of Jutland in such a fitting manner?

**Mr Evennett:** I would certainly be delighted to endorse that comment, and I congratulate those involved.

Communities across the UK that also wish to mark the battle should be aware that the Royal British Legion has made available resources to help communities run local events, including factsheets and other useful information.

In Belfast, the last floating ship that survived the battle of Jutland—HMS Caroline—will be open to the public for the first time. It is managed by the National Museum of the Royal Navy. Thanks to £12.2 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, HMS Caroline will become a significant visitor attraction, where people will discover the role she played in the war and the role of the Irish sailor.

**Suella Fernandes:** On my hon. Friend’s point about the Royal British Legion, will he join me in congratulating one of my constituents, 70-year-old veteran John Hardman, who is running his third triathlon and swimming 1,916 km at Fareham leisure centre to commemorate the battle of Jutland?

**Mr Evennett:** We wish him good luck and congratulate him on taking on that test.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to the 6,094 British and 2,551 German sailors who lost their lives at the battle of Jutland. The battle and the first world war provided key learning that influences the Royal Navy and the armed forces of today. On 31 May, we remember as one nation the battle of Jutland and honour those on all sides who lost their lives during the battle or were affected by the war at sea. We must

ensure that they will never be forgotten. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South for helping to raise awareness about the impact that the battle of Jutland had and to recognise, most definitely, the important role of the Royal Navy in the first world war.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.45 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Written Statements

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Telecommunications Council

Wednesday 25 May 2016

#### TREASURY

#### ECOFIN: 25 May 2016

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council will be held in Brussels on 25 May 2016. EU Finance Ministers are due to discuss the following items:

##### *Anti-tax avoidance package*

The presidency will seek a Council general approach on a compromise text relating to the anti-tax avoidance directive.

##### *Current legislative proposals*

The presidency will update the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

##### *State of play of the banking union*

The Commission will give an update on several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive.

##### *VAT action plan*

The Council will exchange views and aim to agree draft Council conclusions relating to the Commission's VAT action plan, published 7 April, and a European Court of Auditors special report.

##### *European semester*

Following preparation by the Economic and Financial Committee, the Council will adopt conclusions on the 2016 in-depth reviews of macroeconomic imbalances and the implementation of the 2015 country specific recommendations.

[HCWS8]

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** The Telecommunications Council will take place in Brussels on 26 May 2016.

The UK's Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, Shan Morgan, will represent the UK. Below are the agenda items and the positions we intend to adopt.

The first item is for agreement for a general approach on the proposal for a decision on the use of the 470-790 MHz frequency band in the Union (First reading—EM 5814/16 + ADD 1&2). The UK will support this general approach. We do not expect any interventions on this item and UK does not intend to intervene.

This item will be followed by a debate on the EU electronic communications regulatory framework. The debate will be informed by three questions from the presidency. The UK intervention will include the need to consider regulatory tools in addition to the assessment of significant market power in order to improve connectivity in challenging geographical areas. We will also speak about the importance of protecting national competence with respect to spectrum management and of taking a proportionate approach to the regulation of "over the top" services.

This will be followed by five items under AOB. The first two items are a progress report from the presidency on proposal for a directive of the European Union on the accessibility to public sector bodies' websites (First reading—EM 16006/11) and a progress report from the presidency on measures to ensure a high common level of network and information security across the Union (NIS—First reading—EM 6342/13). We do not expect a debate on either of these items. There then follows two further AOB items, both information from the Commission on developments on internet governance and the role of digital platforms in the digital economy respectively. We do not currently expect a debate on either of these items.

Finally, under AOB, the Slovakian delegation will inform the Council of their priorities for their forthcoming presidency before Council adjourns until the next meeting in quarter four 2016.

[HCWS9]



# Petitions

Wednesday 25 May 2016

## OBSERVATIONS

### HEALTH

#### Community pharmacies

*The petition of residents of Scunthorpe,*

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Nic Dakin, *Official Report*, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 508.]

[P001691]

*The petition of residents of the UK,*

Declares that local pharmacies are a vital frontline health service, forming part of the fabric of health communities across England; further that they may be forced to close as a result of Government proposals; further that this could deprive people of accessible medicines advice and other valuable support from trusted professionals; and further that it may also put more pressure on GPs and hospital services.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department of Health to reassess their proposed plans and protect local pharmacies.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tom Brake, *Official Report*, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 5P.]

[P001694]

*Observations from the Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt):*

The Government agree that community pharmacy is a vital part of the NHS. We recognise the public and patient support for community pharmacies locally that this petition has demonstrated.

We want to see a high-quality community pharmacy service that is properly integrated into primary care and public health in line with the Five Year Forward View.

Our proposals are about ensuring we have a modern, efficient community pharmacy sector in England offering patient choice, easier access and fit for the future as well as today.

On 16 March 2016 we announced that the consultation period was to be extended to allow more time to develop the proposed changes with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and others. It closed on 24 May 2016.

We have sought to encourage contributions from all stakeholders, including patients and the public, to help inform our discussions with the PSNC. We will certainly take account of the views of the patients and public who signed this petition.

The Government are committed to maintaining access to pharmacies and pharmacy services and believe efficiencies can be made within community pharmacy without compromising the quality of services or public access to them. Our aim is to ensure that those community pharmacies upon which people depend continue to thrive. That is why we are consulting on a Pharmacy Access Scheme, which will provide more NHS funds to certain pharmacies compared with others, considering factors such as location and the health needs of the local population.

Our proposals are about improving services for patients and the public and securing efficiencies and savings. A consequence may be the closure of some pharmacies but that is not our aim.

We want to promote the use of online, click and collect, or home delivery models to enable patient choice while at the same time maintaining a network of community pharmacies for face to face high quality clinically and public health focused services.

We want to transform the system to deliver efficiency savings and ensure the model of community pharmacy reflects patient and public expectations and developments in technology.

## TRANSPORT

#### Wellington Railway Station

*The petition of residents of Taunton Deane,*

Declares that a new railway station in Wellington in the constituency of Taunton Deane should be opened; further that this project has a local support from residents and businesses; further that the rapidly expanding town is experiencing high volumes of road congestion and that a rail link could help alleviate this and improve local air quality whilst at the same time improving rural transport networks in the area; and further that Taunton Deane Borough Council have committed £40,000 to a feasibility study and pending commitment from the other involved partners we seek the support of the Department of Transport through the New Station Fund.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Department for Transport to open a new metro style railway station in Wellington and support the feasibility study.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rebecca Pow, *Official Report*, 9 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 508.]

[P001692]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):*

Planning and development of new stations is a matter for local authorities to take forward. Guidance on how to do this is provided by Network Rail on behalf of the rail industry. Department for Transport (DfT) officials are ready to provide advice and an overview of strategic issues.



The Chancellor announced in the 2015 Budget that he was making a further £20 million available in a second round of the New Stations Fund (NSF). Work is ongoing to develop the fund with a launch anticipated shortly.

The NSF is able to contribute up to 75% of the total station project costs, with the remainder coming from local authorities and third parties, however funding is not currently available from the NSF to support feasibility studies or initial development works.

New stations are expected to cover running costs from the farebox and this needs to be demonstrated in the business case. Funding would need to be secured from locally determined funding sources to pay for any subsidy the service might need, in particular during the first three years of operation.

Identifying train services may be the biggest challenge in making the case for a new station. The local authorities should liaise with the train operator and Network Rail to determine what services are feasible at the new station.

# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 25 May 2016

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