

Thursday  
7 July 2016

Volume 612  
No. 22



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 7 July 2016**

---



# House of Commons

*Thursday 7 July 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

### CONTINGENCIES FUND

*Resolved,*

That there be laid before this House an Account of the Contingencies Fund, 2015-16, showing—

- (1) A Statement of Financial Position;
- (2) A Statement of Cash Flows; and
- (3) Notes to the Accounts; together with the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Farming Businesses: Resilience**

1. **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): What assistance the Government have given farming businesses to increase their resilience. [905713]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** We have put in place a range of measures to support our farmers and help build their resilience. Government investment in flood defence improvements will provide better protection for 1 million acres of agricultural land. We are investing in innovation, skills and capital items to boost the sector's resilience, and we are working to introduce a dairy futures market to help farmers manage price volatility.

**Luke Hall:** Volatility in global markets and weather conditions often dramatically affects farmers' incomes year on year, sometimes by up to 30%. What steps are the Government taking to help farmers manage that risk?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes an important point and we have acted to deal with that problem. From April this year the Government extended tax averaging for farmers to five years, up from the previous two years, so that they can better offset good years against bad years. In addition, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has a number of schemes, such as the time to pay scheme, which means that it shows forbearance to farmers who are suffering cash-flow difficulties.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Eleven years ago this morning, terrorist attacks were unleashed on our city. We pay our respects today.

As an environmentalist, someone who campaigned in the aftermath of the floods, and a lover of the great outdoors, I am proud to represent Labour as shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Many farming businesses depend on trade with the EU. Following the outcome of the referendum, the resilience of farming will be keenly tested. What immediate steps has the Secretary of State taken to ensure that trade relations with EU partners will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future?

**George Eustice:** I welcome the hon. Lady and her colleagues to the Front Bench of this diverse Department, and I associate myself with her comments about the terrorist attacks.

Following the decision to leave the European Union, we are holding a number of meetings with officials to plan for our next steps on trade—indeed, we will have a meeting today to hold such discussions. It will be a matter for a new Prime Minister and the Cabinet that they put in place, but early thinking and planning work is going on across the Government.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am concerned that resilience was not planned for by the Minister in advance of the EU referendum. Trade and regulations for our food and farming industry are linked to the EU more than in any other sector, yet the Government's cuts to DEFRA up to 2020 will total a 57%—yes, 57%—reduction in its budget. In the light of that, will the Minister explain how his Department will have capacity to analyse the impact of the EU referendum, build resilience, and negotiate the way forward?

**George Eustice:** For the time being we remain in the European Union, and all existing arrangements continue. Only once we have concluded negotiations and left the European Union will we put future measures in place. On capacity in the civil service, some areas and some EU dossiers have a long-term horizon with which we will perhaps be less engaged and involved, and that will free up capacity for some of the planning work that we need for our own domestic policy.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): I record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) for providing us with a taste of Colchester yesterday. One of his constituency's soft fruit farmers emphasised his concern about his resilience, and his dependence on EU migrant labour. Are plans in place to ensure that farmers are supported should migrant labour be reduced?

**George Eustice:** As my right hon. Friend will know, I have worked in the soft fruit industry, and I am familiar with the challenges that certain agricultural sectors face with seasonal labour. Ultimately, the decision that she refers to will be for a new Prime Minister, the Cabinet they choose, and the negotiations that they seek. In recent years we have had models such as seasonal agricultural worker schemes, and there are ways to ensure that the required labour is available.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I tabled five written questions in the past week asking what assessment had been made of the impact of Brexit on a range of DEFRA-related areas, from air pollution to waste, water,

rural payments, fisheries, food standards and food safety. I got one answer back that basically said that everything remains in place and the negotiations are up to the future Prime Minister, which to me shows a shocking degree of complacency. DEFRA, almost more than any other Department, will be affected by Brexit, and I am not reassured by what I have heard this morning that that work has started.

**George Eustice:** I disagree with the hon. Lady. The Government put forward an assessment of the potential impacts of leaving the European Union, which was hotly debated during the referendum. Ultimately, the British public made an assessment of what they wanted to do, and the assessment is that they want to leave the EU. The job of the Government now is to implement that decision.

### Endangered Species: Hunting Trophies

2. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to prevent hunting trophies from threatened or endangered species being imported to the UK. [905714]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** The Government are absolutely clear that we will not allow the import of trophies from critically endangered species when it is unsustainable—tigers, for example. We have also increased the protection and controls on six other species, ranging from elephants to polar bears. We remain absolutely committed to banning the import of lion trophies unless we have significant improvements in lion conservation.

**Kevin Foster:** I thank the Minister for that answer and the general thrust of it. Does he agree, however, that it is morally wrong to kill the most endangered species merely to put a trophy on the wall, and that it would make sense to look to ban more widely the importation of those trophies that come from the most endangered categories?

**Rory Stewart:** I agree absolutely. All hon. Members would agree strongly that, if a species is critically endangered, it is not suitable to be hunted, let alone put on a wall as a trophy. We will look closely at scientific evidence across the range of endangered species. It will be extremely relevant to focus on that, with September and October being the time for the CITES conference in Johannesburg.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Australia and France have both banned the use and import of lion products. What do they know that the Minister refuses to act upon?

**Rory Stewart:** We are looking closely at what Australia and France are doing. We have been working on a common EU-US position in order to change practices in Africa. It makes a huge difference that we do this together as 700 million people in the EU and the US rather than trying to do it individually.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Following the EU referendum vote, we have no idea how the EU action plan against wildlife trafficking

will be implemented by the UK Government. Is the Minister in a position to provide any assurances to the House today?

**Rory Stewart:** As my colleague the Minister of State has pointed out, the details of our position in relation to Europe will have to be determined by a future Prime Minister, but we played a very active role in drafting that plan and pushing for its contents. The hon. Lady will see in what we are doing in Vietnam our commitment to that plan. I reassure her that, certainly as long as I am in this position, the UK's position is absolutely unequivocal.

### Rural Development Programmes

3. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on rural development programmes. [905715]

6. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What assessment she has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on rural development programmes. [905719]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** Until negotiations conclude and the UK leaves the EU, all existing arrangements remain in place, including rural development programmes across the UK. It will be for a new Prime Minister and his or her Cabinet to consider the future shape of rural development once the UK leaves the EU.

**Martyn Day:** The Minister may recall that Scotland voted to remain in the EU in the referendum. Will he commit that nobody in Scotland who benefited from the Scottish rural development programme will lose out on funding?

**George Eustice:** As I have said, while we remain in the EU, all existing arrangements remain in place, including our current rural development programmes. Nothing changes until negotiations have been concluded and a new partnership with the EU is put in place.

**Patricia Gibson:** Agriculture plays a major part in Scotland's £14 billion food and drink industry. Following the uncertainty created by the EU referendum result, what reassurances can the Minister give today to ease the concerns that the result has caused among Scotland's farming communities?

**George Eustice:** I can give farmers throughout the UK the reassurance that, for the time being, we remain in the EU, and all existing arrangements remain in place, including all existing support payments, until we leave the EU, and until a new type of partnership and a new domestic agriculture policy are put in place.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the energy, enthusiasm and intelligence he brought to the leave campaign. Having met farmers in my constituency in Kettering before the vote, it was clear to me that the senior leadership of the National Farmers Union had signed up to "Project Fear" and was trying to scare farmers and rural dwellers into

voting for remain. Now that the result has been decided—in Kettering, we voted overwhelmingly to leave—can we make sure that everyone involved in rural communities and farming talks up rural communities and farming, because we have a very bright future ahead of us?

**George Eustice:** I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. It is important, now the debate has concluded and the country has made its decision, that we move on and focus on next steps and the future. This week, I visited the Livestock Event and had meetings with many farmers. What I find interesting is that once we get past the initial shock—for some—of the decision, people engage with the detail of what might be possible in the future and become more excited about the potential for our future.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that leaving the European Union will provide us with a tremendous opportunity to develop a tailor-made package of measures designed to support and help UK farmers? In fact, there is nothing to stop us starting to work on putting that package together right now.

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I can reassure him that while no decisions will be made until there is a new Prime Minister who has chosen a new Cabinet, the Department is working on options that might be presented to the new Prime Minister.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): One claim from some leave campaigners was that Brexit would lower food prices. Now that Brexit is the decision the country has made, will the Minister tell us what options are available to deliver them?

**George Eustice:** Food prices are driven by a range of factors, most importantly energy prices, developments in weather around the world and exchange rates. Those are the key drivers of our food prices. I have always made clear that while food prices go up and down—they are down 7% over the past two years—they are driven by bigger events than EU membership.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Many farmers and landowners are about to sign higher-level stewardship contracts, but there is a dilemma for Natural England. Many are 10-year contracts and in these uncertain EU times they are being put on hold. Will the Minister give assurances that these precious pieces of environmental biodiversity will not be at risk and that something will happen to protect them?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend puts her finger on an important point, which is that there will be areas and elements where we need continuity. We are having discussions across Government about how to ensure we secure that continuity without prejudicing what a future Prime Minister might want to do.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Meirionnydd is the Sir Nawdd-Feature County at the Royal Welsh agricultural show this month and I hope Ministers will be able to attend. Will the Minister reassure the farmers of Meirionnydd and Wales by

explaining what discussions he has had with colleagues in the Welsh Government regarding the funding of rural development and agricultural schemes in Wales?

**George Eustice:** I have regular discussions with my opposite numbers in the devolved Administrations. I hope I will be able to meet the new Welsh Administration when I next go to Council in Europe, which is in about two weeks' time, and discuss these issues in more detail. I also hope to attend the Royal Welsh show this year.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): I welcome the shadow Minister and her team to their place. Will the Minister confirm that his plans to ensure the fair allocation of the convergence uplift are on track? Will he tell us when Scottish farmers should expect to receive increased payments?

**George Eustice:** We have always had a commitment to review the allocation of common agricultural policy budgets—the so-called convergence uplift, as the hon. Gentleman refers to it—during 2016. I had a meeting and early discussions with NFU Scotland in January. Now that the Scottish elections are over and we have passed the referendum purdah, I would expect to be able to progress those discussions with the Scottish Government in the autumn.

#### **Data: Public Availability**

4. **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): What progress her Department and its agencies have made on making data publicly available in the last 12 months. [905716]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Last summer, I set a target for DEFRA of releasing 8,000 datasets. By this summer, I am delighted to say that we have achieved 11,000 datasets, which means that more than a third of Government data is DEFRA data. This is bringing real benefits to people, providing information about air quality, better flooding data and landscape data for farmers and architects.

**Craig Whittaker:** As the Calder Valley assesses how to spend the much appreciated funding for flood defences, many community groups want to contribute to alleviating floods—doing things such as planting trees, building dams and upland management, to name but a few. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that information on all water flows held by the Environment Agency and Natural England will be made readily available to help community groups to decide where the schemes should be placed?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend has done a fantastic job in championing the Calder Valley. I want to ensure that all that information is available so that we can manage whole catchments, including the Calder, for flood defences. What happened over last year's very difficult floods was that more information was made available to the public. For example, there were 19.5 million hits on our flood information service website. What I want to do is make even more information available to the public.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State keep data on how many scientists are working in agricultural technology and on how

much money is spent on agricultural technology and research? Is she not worried that, with ChemChina taking over Syngenta and the amazing Jealott's Hill research capacity, there is a real danger of our research space being eroded?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that our research base and our agri-tech are vitally important. That is the future of agriculture, with more precision farming and better use of data. I am determined to do all we can to protect and grow that. That is why we are investing £160 million in our agri-tech budget. Of course we need to plan even more for the future.

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): Has the Department made available up-to-date data on the effect of the temporary neonicotinoid ban on both agricultural production and the health of bees, especially honey bees? If not, when will that data be available?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are looking at further research in this area. More research is due to be published and there are already many published pieces of research. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the decision on the use of neonicotinoids in the UK is made by the independent pesticides committee. It is made by Ministers, but we follow the scientific advice of that committee, whose minutes are fully published.

### Regional Food and Drink

5. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What recent steps the Great British Food Unit has taken to promote regional food and drink. [905718]

7. **Sir Simon Burns** (Chelmsford) (Con): What recent steps the Great British Food Unit has taken to promote regional food and drink. [905720]

10. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What progress her Department has made on promoting regional food and drink. [905723]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** We launched the Great British Food Unit in January to promote our fantastic British produce around the world. In April, I was in the US working to open the market for beef and lamb, as well as promoting fantastic British products such as the classic gin and tonic.

**Graham Evans:** That sounds good, but for me it is a bit early for gin and tonic! Food and drink exports, not least the world-famous Cheshire cheese, are very important for the Cheshire economy. Given this country's decision to leave the European Union, how important is the role of the Great British Food Unit in helping farmers in my constituency and indeed throughout the UK to get the necessary export markets?

**Elizabeth Truss:** In my opinion, it is never too early for a gin and tonic! I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Now that the British people have made the decision to leave the EU, the Great British Food Unit is even more important. We already have missions planned for the Gulf, China and Japan to open more markets for fantastic British food. I am going to increase the resources

going into the Great British Food Unit to make sure that we turbo-charge our efforts to export more British food right around the world.

**Sir Simon Burns:** Does my right hon. Friend accept that Essex is home to some of the finest food, drink and countryside in the nation? What does she think is the link between food and tourism, and what more can be done to promote it?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We know that for a third of all visitors, food is a major factor in deciding where to visit. It is hugely important, which is why DEFRA is backing food tourism. We recently backed the "tour culinaire" to Yorkshire, which accompanied the cycle race and featured fantastic Yorkshire products such as liquorice. I would be delighted to discuss with my right hon. Friend how we could do something similar in Essex in respect of fantastic products such as Tiptree strawberry jam.

**Richard Graham:** The Secretary of State will be delighted to learn that, since she visited Gloucester Services in February, it has been given both a sustainability award and the first Royal Institute of British Architects award ever given to a motorway services station. Famously, while she was there she enjoyed a Gloucester Old Spot sausage for breakfast. I hope that she will now confirm that, during our renegotiations with the European Union, she will seek to extend the protections given to Gloucester Old Spot meat, Single Gloucester cheese, and other great British foods.

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for a very enjoyable visit to Gloucester Services. I am delighted that its chief executive, Sarah Dunning, has agreed to be one of our food pioneers, promoting Great British food around Britain and around the world. I look forward to talking to my hon. Friend about how we can protect these great products when they are not just a matter for the European Union, but are more widely known around the world.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Nick Smith.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Cheers, Mr Speaker. [*Laughter.*] I am glad that the food unit is showing success. However, while the Secretary of State boasts about her support for British food, DEFRA headquarters sources almost half its food from overseas, and other Departments are falling even further behind. Why is DEFRA not ensuring that Departments back our great British food?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We absolutely are ensuring that Departments are backing British food. For example, more than 90% of the dairy products sourced by the Government come from the United Kingdom. There are, of course, some products, such as coffee, that we cannot yet produce in the UK, although now that we are able to produce our own aubergines, tomatoes and chillies, I am sure we are not far away from that.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): One of the items on the Great British Food website is the promotion of the EU protected food name scheme. According to

the site, 73 products in the United Kingdom are protected under the scheme. What will replace it once the UK Government have dragged us out of the European Union?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I think the number of protected food names has risen to 74, but the website may not have been updated.

This is an extremely important issue, and it is one of the issues on which we are working at the moment. However, I hope that we will develop a British protected food names status in the future.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Armagh apples, Comber potatoes, Irish whiskey and Lough Neagh eels are just some of the protected food names that we have in Northern Ireland. What discussions has the Great British Food Unit had with Food NI to help promote those great foods and drinks throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I was delighted to visit Belfast and the huge show there, and to taste some of those products for myself. They are truly outstanding, and I am working closely with the Northern Irish Minister on promoting them throughout the world. They were heavily represented on our recent trade mission to China, and we will certainly be doing more work on that in the future.

**Mr Speaker:** As a Member has just left the Chamber while exchanges on the question to which he contributed were ongoing, may I gently point out to the House that Members should stay in the Chamber until all the exchanges on their question, or the question to which they contributed, have been completed? It is quite an elementary courtesy.

### Badger Culls

8. **Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of recent badger culls. [905721]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** During 2015, badger control operations in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset were all successful in meeting their targets. According to the Chief Veterinary Officer's advice, the results show that industry-led badger control can deliver the level of effectiveness that will enable us to be confident of achieving disease control benefits.

**Ann Clwyd:** Badger culling in England costs about £7,000 per badger killed. In Wales, the badger vaccination programme costs about £700 per badger vaccinated. Lord Krebs, who is a renowned expert on the subject, has continually said that

“rolling out culling as a national policy to control TB in cattle is not really credible.”

Does the Minister accept that?

**George Eustice:** TB is costing the country £100 million a year, and that is why we have to act. The veterinary advice is clear—we cannot have a coherent strategy to eradicate TB without also tackling the disease in the wildlife population. Following advice from the World

Health Organisation, the vaccination operations in Wales, as in England, have been suspended because there is a lack of vaccine.

### Farmers: Support Payments

9. **Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): If the Government will underwrite basic payment scheme payments at current levels until the end of 2020.

[905722]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Until we leave the EU it will be business as usual; farmers will continue to receive support payments. We are developing options for future domestic policy. Ultimately this will be a decision for the new Prime Minister. I am working very closely with organisations such as the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association, and environmental groups, which will have a role to play in helping us develop these policies.

**Angela Smith:** I am very pleased to hear that groups such as the NFU and the CLA are going to be involved in finding a way out of this mess. Can the Minister guarantee that the CAP subsidy up to 2020 will be underwritten not just for the basic payment scheme but for pillar 2 schemes—agri-environment schemes?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As I said, until we leave the EU those schemes will be in place, but when leaving takes place, after article 50 is triggered and the process is gone through, this will be a decision for the new Prime Minister. It is not a decision I can make at this stage.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is not only important to keep the basic farm payment going but vital that we get it fixed, because the Rural Payments Agency is still having big problems. Lots of the payments to farmers have not been ratified and not properly made. What is actually happening with the Rural Payments Agency?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can tell my hon. Friend that 99.6% of farmers have now received a payment. This year, for the first time, the system has had prepayment cheques to make sure that we did not overpay farmers and then end up having to claw back the money. That means that there will be a reconciliation period when we make the adjustments—that is taking place at the moment—so that farmers who had a problem in their application will receive the extra payment over the next few months. We are fully on track for payment on time next year.

### Food Prices

11. **Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): What assessment she has made of recent trends in food prices. [905724]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** DEFRA monitors retail food prices through the consumer prices index. Year on year, food prices have continued to fall, with a 2.8% fall in the year to May 2016. We also monitor trends in household expenditure on food through the

family food survey. Following a period of higher food price inflation, retail food prices have fallen by 7% since their peak in February 2014.

**Jessica Morden:** Last week I visited a very successful food supplier in my constituency that told me that it was already putting up its prices because of changes in the exchange rate hitting imports, and predicted food inflation of up to 8% within months, following the leave vote. Clearly there are real impacts now. How will the Minister respond to a spike in UK food prices, which is a crucial issue for consumers?

**George Eustice:** As I explained earlier, one of the factors that has an influence on food prices is exchange rates. A number of analysts have been saying that in fact the pound has been unsustainably high against the euro for some time, caused by concerns about the weaknesses of the eurozone, and that the correction we have seen was overdue anyway. Exchange rates go up and down, but the crucial thing is that we have a competitive food supply industry in this country.

### Apprenticeships

12. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What recent steps the Government have taken to work with industry to increase the number of apprenticeships in the food, farming and agri-technology sector. [905725]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** The Government are committed to trebling the number of apprentices in the food and farming sector by 2020. I am delighted that the Skills Minister has committed to the apprenticeship levy being used by major organisations such as supermarkets and food manufacturers through the food supply chain, so that they can help small and medium-sized enterprises and farmers to take on apprentices.

**Huw Merriman:** As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on bees, I got a tremendous buzz from welcoming apprentices of British bee farmers who are completing an innovative three-year programme in an industry with sales of over £100 million per year. What steps are the Government taking to encourage more honey providers to take on apprentices?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Honey is an important product for our country, generating over £100 million. As I have said, the apprenticeships that are created through the apprenticeship levy can be found throughout the food chain. DEFRA has its own beekeeper apprentice helping to maintain our hives at Noble House—DEFRA's headquarters—where we produce our own Whitehall honey.

### Topical Questions

T1. [905703] **Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Two weeks ago, the British people voted to leave the European Union. I will be ensuring that food, farming and the environment

have a strong voice in the exit negotiations and in establishing our new domestic policies. Until we leave the EU, it is business as usual for farmers and the environment, and I am meeting relevant organisations to assure them of that. DEFRA's work continues: we will shortly be publishing the national flood resilience review; we will be continuing with our Great British Food campaign and our work to open up new markets; and we will be developing 14 local environment plans.

**Alec Shelbrooke:** Following the devastating Boxing day floods last year, will my right hon. Friend tell me and my constituents what long-term plans are being put in place to protect low-lying villages in my constituency, such as Methley, Mickletown, Allerton Bywater and Woodlesford?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He has been an assiduous advocate of his constituency, ensuring that towns and villages in his area are not adversely affected by flood defences upstream. We will be working on an overall plan for the River Aire catchment, through which we will manage the overall river flow instead of looking at individual places. That will form part of our national flood resilience review, which we will be announcing shortly.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The horticultural industry is particularly vulnerable following the leave vote due to the high proportion of EU seasonal workers in the sector. How will the Secretary of State ensure that our crops are harvested in this uncertain period by securing continued labour from the EU?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and welcome her to the Dispatch Box. She was a fantastic advocate for her constituents during the difficult flooding in York, and I look forward to working with her.

As for agricultural workers, my constituency is a great producer of salad vegetables and onions, and I fully understand the importance of EU workers to our agricultural industry. It will be one of the key things that DEFRA will work on, putting the case across Government to ensure that we continue to have that supply of workers.

**Rachael Maskell:** It is evident from the Secretary of State's responses that her Department did not make contingency plans for a leave vote, failing in its duty to protect not only one of our major industries, but those who work in it. Will the Secretary of State confirm that all EU citizens working in farming can remain in the UK, which the vote on yesterday's Opposition day motion called for, and that she has already made representations to the Home Office?

**Elizabeth Truss:** It is absolutely clear that it is business as usual while we remain members of the EU and that those workers will continue to work in those areas. The reality is that I cannot make decisions for a future Prime Minister. That is the fundamental issue here and that is why my job over the coming months is to be a strong voice for farming and the environment in the overall negotiations.

T2. [905704] **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): Following the floods in Carlisle, I am concerned that a group of leaseholders will not be able to get insurance under Flood Re. They consist of 68 long leaseholders with a management company as the freeholder with responsibility for insurance. That management company has not been able to obtain insurance so far. Will the Minister look into the issue and consider amending the legislation if necessary?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** In addition to welcoming the shadow Secretary of State to her position, may I also welcome my friend the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) to his position?

As for the flooding in Carlisle, my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) is a great champion of his constituency. If there is an individual leasehold property, it would be covered with affordable insurance under Flood Re. Unfortunately, when there is a larger number of properties, such as the more than 60 properties that the landlord has in this case, it would be classified as commercial insurance and would require a bespoke, tailored commercial insurance product from the insurance industry. I am happy to look at the individual case, and the British Insurance Brokers Association is also coming up with tailored products exactly to address such commercial risks.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Minister for his erudite treatise.

T4. [905706] **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Scotland's food and drink industry exports £725 million-worth of produce to the European Union. Given the disastrous Brexit vote, what impact does the Minister believe any restrictions on the seasonal workforce will have on the industry north of the border?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. It shows why we are turbo-charging the work of the Great British Food Unit, to make sure that we open up new markets and get more of our products out into the world, as well as into the European Union. I am clear that agriculture and food has major export growth potential, which is why I am having a meeting today with the Business Secretary to talk about our trade negotiations and making sure that food is a key part of those.

T3. [905705] **Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Our farms have some of the highest livestock welfare standards in the world, so how will that be recognised in upcoming trade negotiations? We will be doing our farmers a disservice if cheap imported food produced with very little regard for livestock welfare comes into the UK.

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** My hon. Friend makes an important point. He will be aware that we have a manifesto commitment to recognise animal welfare standards in our trade negotiations. That is particularly important in sectors such as poultry meat during Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership discussions, and I can assure him that we make these representations to the European Commission.

T8. [905711] **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Government decided against using DEFRA funding to implement a clean air zone in Manchester. Greater Manchester is expected to miss our 2020 air quality targets, because of the high levels of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter caused by road transport. Will the Government look again at a scrappage scheme for older vehicles and at incentives to encourage the use of hybrid and electric cars?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. According to our projections, Greater Manchester will hit, by being below, the 40 mg target, which is why it has not been included in the mandatory clean air zones. We are shortly about to consult on those, but the legislation is in place for Greater Manchester to put in that clean air zone if it wishes to do so; I believe in devolution, and surely it is a matter for the local council if it wants to take that forward.

T5. [905707] **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): The recent Environmental Audit Committee report on the important subject of soil highlighted that a significant proportion of our agricultural land will be become unproductive within a generation. Will the Minister therefore meet me to discuss the sustainable management of soils, so that emphasis is put on treating them as ecosystems, rather than as growing mediums? A monitoring scheme would really help.

**Rory Stewart:** My hon. Friend correctly says that soils are not just for short-term production; they are incredibly important stores of organic matter. There is a lot that we can do, and are doing, on precision farming and shelter belts. Rothamsted Research is also doing work on this issue, but I would be delighted to meet her and to make sure that this is central to our 25-year plan.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): More than half the population of England live within an hour of a national park, but many young people and their families struggle to get to them because rural bus services have been hit by devastating cuts and eye-watering fare rises. This is Catch the Bus week, so can the Secretary of State tell us what discussions she has had with the Transport Secretary about making our countryside accessible by public transport?

**Rory Stewart:** DEFRA takes that very seriously; we have a responsibility for rural affairs. We have very regular contact with the Department for Transport on this issue, and we supported it on developing community bus schemes. There is much more we can do. As the hon. Lady has pointed out, without communications connections, which buses are central to, rural areas will be disadvantaged.

T6. [905708] **Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): On 27 April, the Prime Minister confirmed to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) that the Government are working on a flood insurance plan for the many small and medium-sized businesses in flood-risk areas that are excluded from insurance cover. Will the Minister update the House on how those plans are going?

**Rory Stewart:** My hon. Friend has been an extraordinary champion for his constituency—indeed, he had a late Christmas day celebration a couple of days ago. I saw at first hand with him the devastation for businesses in Calder Valley, ranging from furniture shops to carpentry manufacturers. The problem on commercial insurance is, of course, that different businesses have different attitudes towards interruption payments and excesses. However, that is being addressed through the BIBA process and, most importantly, through the investment in flood defences.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): I fully understand the 2009 cut-off date for Flood Re, of which developers and local authorities should have been fully aware, but what more can the Minister do to make it legally binding to inform purchasers that they will not be eligible for Flood Re? What about properties that are downhill of new developments that have subsequently become more at risk as a result of developments built since 2009?

**Rory Stewart:** Fundamentally, the answer to these issues is to ensure that we have good flood defences and that we build resilience in housing, but it is absolutely correct to say that we need to ensure that transparency is part of that. Somebody buying a house needs to know that it is at flood risk so that they can make an intelligent decision—ideally, it would be not to buy that house.

T7. [905710] **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): The excellent annual Trawden show takes place on Sunday 14 August. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Trawden and District Agricultural Society on organising the event, and does she agree that agriculture shows in communities play a key role in promoting agriculture to a wider audience?

**Elizabeth Truss:** Agriculture shows are fantastic. I have been to a large number this year, culminating in the fantastic Norfolk show last week. I want to give my compliments to the Trawden show and wish it all the best for 14 August.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Literally thousands of EU nationals play an indispensable role in fish processing and agriculture businesses in my constituency, yet this week the Government have failed to give any reassurance that these people will be allowed to live and work here post-Brexit. Will the Secretary of State and her Ministers make every effort to use all their influence with the Home Secretary to provide some certainty at an early stage for these people and these businesses?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As I said in response to an earlier question, I agree that the EU workers are an important part of both the agriculture and fishing sectors, and we are working on this at the moment.

**Mr Speaker:** Finally and very briefly, Mark Menzies.

**Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has a very important visitor centre at Fairhaven lake in my constituency. The Ribble estuary, one of the most important estuaries anywhere

in the UK, attracts about 270,000 birds per year. What are the Government doing to ensure that local children are engaging with the RSPB and gaining bird knowledge?

**Rory Stewart:** That is a fantastic result—270,000 birds. The Environment Agency and Natural England are working very closely with the RSPB in the Ribble estuary. Connecting children to nature is absolutely essential. If we are to protect nature for the future, people need to love it. The key is to ensure that children not only access nature, but understand it and respond to it.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We come now to questions to the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), representing the Church Commissioners, and to the right hon. Member for South West Devon—[*Interruption.*] I mean the hon. Member for South West Devon (Mr Streeter)—it is only a matter of time—representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners was asked—*

### Out-of-school Education Settings

1. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What discussions the Church of England has had with the Government on plans to regulate out-of-school education settings. [905693]

3. **Andrew Stephenson:** (Pendle) What discussions the Church of England has had with the Government on plans to regulate out-of-school education settings. [905695]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman):** Representatives of the Church of England have taken part in detailed consultations with the Government over the proposals to regulate out-of-school settings. I recently led a delegation of Back Benchers to a meeting at the Cabinet Office and we learned that this policy remains under review. I am hopeful that something will emerge that meets the key concerns that many of us have voiced.

**Oliver Colvile:** What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the Government regarding the new proportionality and the current role of existing regulations, such as data barring service checks, in out-of-school settings?.

**Mrs Spelman:** This is important because the Church of England provides 500,000 children with out-of-school education activities, which involves 80,000 volunteers. However, as hon. Members will know, anyone who works with children in out-of-school settings has to be subject to a careful check—the Disclosure and Barring Service check. There is no suggestion that our representations to Government in any way undermine

our determination that children should be well protected, but we believe that they are in what the Church of England provides.

**Andrew Stephenson:** Religious organisations across Pendle, including Islamic education centres in Brierfield and Nelson, and the Barnoldswick Gospel Mission, which currently runs a Sunday school, have expressed concerns that the Government plans will be restrictive and prevent them from expanding their current educational work. In my right hon. Friend's discussions with Government, has she received any further indications of a time scale for when these proposals may be brought forward?

**Mrs Spelman:** I am as anxious as my hon. Friend to have a rapid outcome on this decision, but, until a new Prime Minister is in place, Ministers are saying clearly that the final decision cannot be made. We received an assurance from the Minister for Schools that the Government have no intention of seeking to regulate religion or to interfere in parents' right to teach children about their faith and their heritage.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Does the right hon. Lady agree that any Church activities—Sunday schools, Brownies, or Boys or Girls Brigades, to name a few examples—must not be unduly affected by the Government's plan for out-of-school regulation?

**Mrs Spelman:** We impressed on Ministers that the kind of out-of-school activities that the Church provides, which the hon. Gentleman has just cited, are subject to rigorous checking processes within the Church. Indeed, we reminded Ministers that providing such out-of-school education in a domestic setting is governed by childminding regulations.

### Human Trafficking

2. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What recent steps have been taken by the Church of England to tackle human trafficking. [905694]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Bishop of Derby has been at the forefront of working to tackle human trafficking and modern slavery within the Church. I had the pleasure of serving with him on the pre-legislative scrutiny Joint Committee on the draft Modern Slavery Bill. He has set up and been part of the Santa Marta process to improve collaboration between Churches and police forces in the detection of instances of human trafficking.

**Henry Smith:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for that answer. What plans does the Church have to roll out that scheme to the rest of England. With Gatwick in my constituency, I would certainly like to see that.

**Mrs Spelman:** We all understand my hon. Friend's concern because of his constituency's location. The Church is building on the Bishop of Derby's work and intends to launch the Clewer initiative against modern-day slavery in the autumn. It will be designed to combat modern-day slavery across England and provide parishes and dioceses with strategies to detect instances of modern-day slavery.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): One of the most powerful ways to get any message across is from the personal testimony of victims. A lot of people are realising that human trafficking is hidden in local communities, so what efforts is the Church making to identify and encourage Christian victims of human trafficking to bear witness in their churches and communities?

**Mrs Spelman:** When I served on the Joint Committee on the draft Modern Slavery Bill, the hidden nature of trafficking became apparent, and Churches can lift the lid on the prevalence of trafficking in the society in which we live. It is incumbent on us all to have our eyes and ears open and to ask questions when we suspect that someone may be being exploited as result of trafficking.

### ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

*The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—*

#### Referendum Manifestos

4. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): If the Electoral Commission will make an assessment of the merits of requiring lead campaign groups in referendum campaigns to publish manifestos. [905696]

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon): Thank you for your earlier endorsement, Mr Speaker.

The Electoral Commission is collecting information to inform its statutory report on the EU referendum, and I will pass the hon. Lady's suggestion to it for its consideration.

**Dr Huq:** Rapidly after the referendum results, central claims on both sides evaporated—the extra spending for the NHS, the emergency punitive Budget, and the UK being the fifth largest economy—so surely, if we are ever to conduct referendums again in this country, should not the lead campaigns on both sides publish measurable claims in a manifesto, so that truth is not the casualty of the scramble for votes?

**Mr Streeter:** The Electoral Commission has no desire whatsoever—it certainly has no such power at the moment—to sit in judgment on the truthfulness of any claim made in any campaign. The hon. Lady's idea that lead campaigns should produce manifestos is an interesting one that I will pass on to the commission for its consideration of the referendum overall.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): May I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that the Electoral Commission does not waste its time carrying out such an assessment? Manifestos are for political parties and, by definition, a referendum is on a single issue.

**Mr Streeter:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, but the Electoral Commission will carry out an assessment of the conduct of the EU referendum, including a survey of people's levels of satisfaction of several aspects of the referendum, and that will be produced in the report, which will be made available to hon. Members.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): In advance of the Scottish independence referendum, the Government published “Scotland’s Future”—a comprehensive White Paper and blueprint for how the transition to independence would be managed. The complete lack of a coherent plan from the leave campaign and the chaos that has ensued has highlighted a huge disparity. What is the Government’s position on manifestos for referendums?

**Mr Streeter:** Certainly, prior to 9 September, I do not speak for the Government, and therefore it is not a matter for the Electoral Commission.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): As my hon. Friend will know, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) pointed out, referendums are about settling a single question, not electing a Government on a manifesto. However, one thing that many people do want is facts. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be worth the Electoral Commission looking at whether a fact checker-style website could be a useful source of information, given the claims made in the Scottish and EU referendums?

**Mr Streeter:** It is important that the Electoral Commission remains independent in our political debates, and it has no desire whatever to sit in judgment on the truthfulness of any claim or counterclaim. It is important, however, that all sides are responsible in the claims they make, and there are various independent means of verifying claims, but that is not a matter for the Electoral Commission.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

### Lords Spiritual

5. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): If the Church of England will make it its policy that bishops sitting in the House of Lords do not participate in debates or vote on legislation that relates to Scotland. [905697]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman):** I was slightly surprised by this question. I perfectly appreciate that the SNP is opposed to the House of Lords on ideological grounds, but I was unaware that it had adopted a narrow position on the Lords Spiritual. I expect the irony is not lost on the hon. Gentleman that he is exercising his right as a Member of this House representing a Scottish constituency to scrutinise the affairs of the Church of England—a scrutiny, I would add, that I welcome.

**Alan Brown:** I would point out that legislation on English votes for English laws means that I, as a Member of this House, cannot vote on issues that pertain to England only. [*Interruption.*] No, I cannot—my vote is discounted. I would therefore ask the right hon. Lady to reconsider the position on the Lords Spiritual participating in proceedings on legislation that affects Scotland.

**Mrs Spelman:** All Members of the other place are able to take part in proceedings on legislation put before Parliament, and bishops take that duty very seriously. They are independent, and they do not take the party Whip, so these things are up to each of them. At least two of them have family links to Scotland,

which may give them a reason to have a closer interest. This may be the moment for me to come out in the Chamber as a half-Scot—my maiden name was Cormack, from the Clan Buchanan. I think that demonstrates the point that there are Members in all parties and in both Houses who have a great love for Scotland.

### Women Bishops

6. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): What steps the Church of England is taking to encourage the appointment of more women bishops. [905698]

7. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What plans the Church of England has to promote women in leadership positions. [905699]

**Mrs Spelman:** As the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) has assiduously asked me this question on several occasions, I am delighted to be able to inform him that a further six women have been appointed as bishops: the diocesan Bishop of Newcastle, with a seat in another place, and five suffragan bishops—of Taunton, Aston, Sherborne, Repton and Dorking.

**Mr Sheerman:** I thank the right hon. Lady for that excellent answer. As she mentioned, this is a bit of a campaign on my part. I want to fill the churches, and one of the ways we do that is by having more women bishops. However, how many are there out of the total number? What is the percentage? There are some very good women who have not been promoted yet.

**Mrs Spelman:** This is a campaign the hon. Gentleman is well able to take some credit for, and I am sure my predecessor is too. Some 18 suffragan bishops have been appointed, eight of whom have been women, which is 45% of all appointments.

**Michael Tomlinson:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the new Bishop of Sherborne, Karen Gorham, to her place? Her first official engagement was a confirmation service in Lytchett Minster parish church, at which, I am proud to say, my son was one of the candidates. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that Karen Gorham’s appointment will encourage other women into leadership positions in the Church of England?

**Mrs Spelman:** Yes, indeed, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on his son’s confirmation. An increasing number of younger women have indeed entered the priesthood. Some 47% of the clergy ordained in 2015 were female, and 22% of the women ordained in 2015 were under 40.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope the whole House wishes to congratulate Tomlinson junior. That is now on the record.

### Disadvantaged Communities

8. **Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): What work the Church of England is undertaking to help improve the life chances of people in disadvantaged communities. [905701]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church of England's House of Bishops recently published a new discussion paper, "Thinking afresh about welfare", which is intended to help discussion across the Church as it engages with the Government's life chances agenda.

**Derek Thomas:** The Church of England and other denominations and faith groups have always led the way in helping our most vulnerable people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that faith groups and voluntary organisations are ideally placed to help the Government improve life chances for all, including the homeless, young people and people with disabilities?

**Mrs Spelman:** Yes. The diocese of Truro is particularly committed to improving the life chances of children and young people living there, including on the Isles of Scilly. That is lived out principally through the schools, which are committed to building character and improving employment skills. However, I did just notice that there is a homeless breakfast initiative in Penzance, so these efforts are not confined to children, but also extend to adults.

#### **Historic Churches: Toilet Provision**

9. **John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the adequacy of toilet provision for visitors to historic churches.

[905702]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church Buildings Council has been promoting through its "Open and Sustainable Churches" initiative how parishes can adapt their buildings for wider community use. Most schemes for work in church buildings that the Church Buildings Council now see will include installing an accessible toilet if there is not one already present.

**Mr Speaker:** Let us hear the views of Mr Mann on the matter of toilets.

**John Mann:** Mr Speaker, imagine that you came to visit the historic Scrooby church to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Pilgrim Fathers, and, as a modern man, drank tea or coffee on the way, which people did not do when these historic churches were built. It would be easy to be caught short. Many of these great historic churches lack toilets. Should not a fund be created somewhere to allow visitors the comfort break that may be required, given that we live in a modern coffee and tea-drinking era?

**Mr Speaker:** The House is very expectant. We really want to hear this answer.

**Mrs Spelman:** I am delighted to be able to say that the Church is making great progress with the provision of the facilities that the hon. Gentleman describes. Currently, 55% of the 31 listed Church of England churches in his constituency have installed new toilet and kitchen facilities.

## Business of the House

10.31 am

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 11 JULY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Wales Bill.

TUESDAY 12 JULY—Opposition day (5th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 13 JULY—Motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to terrorism, followed by general debate on the report of the Iraq inquiry (day 1).

THURSDAY 14 JULY—Conclusion of the general debate on the report of the Iraq inquiry.

FRIDAY 15 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 18 July will be:

MONDAY 18 JULY—Debate on an e-petition relating to changes to the student loans agreement.

**Paul Flynn:** I thank the Leader of the House for that information. As the Speaker now processes majestically from the Chair to Speaker's House, I wonder whether he has been issued with a parliamentary umbrella. Last week, I noticed two yellow buckets on the route to collect the rain, and today there is one white bucket. Will the Leader of the House tell us when we are going to get this palace into a habitable state? Can he also remind us which party promised to fix the roof while the sun was shining?

The House is grateful, as ever, to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). He is a rarity on the Government Back Benches as a man who is occasionally caught in possession of an intelligent thought, and who speaks real English—the language that the rest of us speak. This week, he gave us vital intelligence on the three remaining candidates for the leadership of the Tory party: one of them is “bloody difficult”; one does not expect to deliver on the extremely stupid things she has been saying; and one would declare war on at least three countries. We have a legitimate interest in this, because the winner of this race will also be the Prime Minister.

I suggest to the Conservatives that they perhaps repeat the great success that they had in Totnes, where they introduced the system of a primary vote in which everyone took part. It would be wonderful to have the chance to write-in a candidate such as the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe. Happily, at his time of life, he has passed beyond the stages of ambition and vanity that afflict many in political life. If he is reluctant to return to the Dispatch Box because he is of a certain age, let me remind him of what I have discovered: the Dispatch Box is a vital support and a wonderful alternative to a Zimmer frame.

Two days next week are given to a matter of the highest importance. Chilcot concluded that the UK chose to join the war in Iraq before the peaceful options were exhausted. We must not let artifice, denial, spin, delusions and expensive barrister-created obfuscation

mask the vital Chilcot truths. Chilcot concluded that Government, Opposition and three Select Committees of this House were wrong in 2003, and our decisions led to an avoidable war.

Our reputation as politicians fell to rock bottom during the expenses scandal, but since then it has fallen further and it is now subterranean. We need to recognise the whole truths of Chilcot. We should debate this next week in a very serious atmosphere. We did it; the decisions were taken in this House. I and many other Members were here at the time. Our mood should be one of humility, penitence and respect for all those who put their lives at risk at our command.

The dedication, professionalism and courage of our servicemen were as great and splendid as any in our entire proud military history. We want to express in those two days next week our profound gratitude to all who have given their lives and their service, and who have been maimed in body and mind by the experience of going to the wars, some of which—Kosovo and Sierra Leone—were magnificent achievements in the extension of peace and human rights around the world.

There is another group that we need to bear in mind next week. Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to the loved ones who were bereaved by the war. We saw yesterday that they were forced to revisit their grief with the added pain of the knowledge from Chilcot that their loved ones possibly died in vain. To them, Parliament should offer our heartfelt sympathy, our regrets and our apologies, because we know that the responsibility was ours. We should hope above all that the spirits of all who died as a result of our decisions may now rest in peace.

**Chris Grayling:** It is worth the whole House remembering that today is 7 July, and it is appropriate to remember the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place on this day in 2005. It is also appropriate to send our good wishes and commiserations to the Welsh football team. They have done this country proud and they have done Wales proud. They have exceeded all expectations, and I hope and believe that they will go on to great things at the World cup, when the time comes.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on being here again. I was not entirely certain whether he would still be with us this week, because there have been so many changes in the Opposition. Not only is he still here, but he has another job; he is now also the shadow Welsh Secretary. I congratulate him on that appointment and on becoming one of the longest-serving members of the shadow Cabinet. I hope to see him here again next week.

On the Chilcot report, we all acknowledge that it is a substantial piece of work and all involved in its preparation deserve a lot of credit. It has taken a long time to come, and we have had lots of discussions in this place about when it would arrive, but I do not think that anybody could say that it is not an exhaustive piece of analysis that has set out for us all the rights and wrongs of what took place 10 years ago.

I know that the hon. Gentleman feels immensely strongly about this issue. He has been a consistent advocate for the point of view that he has just articulated, and I commend him for that. I hope that the fact that the Government have provided a two-day debate on this

matter next week is a sign of how seriously we take it, and how seriously we take the need to understand the rights and wrongs of the decisions that were taken a decade ago. He is absolutely right to say that it is an appropriate moment for this House to pay tribute to our armed forces, to those who lost their lives, to those who were injured and to their families. In all circumstances we should recognise the enormous contribution that our armed forces make, the bravery of the people in them, and the bravery of their families.

The hon. Gentleman referred to fixing the roof while the sun is shining. A large programme is taking place to restore some of the Victorian roofing. The Committee looking at the restoration and renewal project is heading towards the completion of its work. Over the coming years, we will all have to work together to make sure that this building is made fit for this century. It is the heart of our democracy. He is right to identify that many things are currently wrong with it but we have a duty to sustain it as the heart of our democracy and protect it for future generations.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke). I suspect that the Home Secretary will not be distressed by being likened to Margaret Thatcher. I understand the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for taking part in the Conservative leadership election, and for being able to express a view on who our next Prime Minister will be. To be honest, if I was on the Opposition Benches I would want to take part in our leadership contest as well, because try as it might, no matter how hard it struggles, the Labour party does not seem to be able to have one itself.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on flooding? It seems a long time since my constituency and many others were affected by the terrible floods over Christmas, but we should not forget the people affected just because it is now summer and the weather is better. Many people are still not back in their homes. Many of the flood defences required to make sure that that situation does not happen again have not been put in place. We could either have a debate or the Leader of the House could ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make a statement on the progress made in helping those affected and the work needed so that people do not have to suffer the same distress again.

**Chris Grayling**: My hon. Friend will be aware that I visited the Colne valley soon after the floods and am acutely aware of the impact that that period of heavy rain had on homes and businesses in and around West Yorkshire, as well as in other parts of the country. I know this matter is of great concern to the Secretary of State and will make sure that she is aware that these concerns have been raised again today. We clearly want to do the right thing for those affected by flooding. Since 2010 we have continued to spend money on flood defences and will continue to do so.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. He is absolutely correct that it is right and appropriate that we remember the victims of 7/7 today on the 11th anniversary of that appalling and dreadful act.

It is also right and proper that business next week is dominated by the Chilcot report. We are all grateful that the Leader of the House has listened to the many representations made on all sides of the House for that debate to be extended to two days. Although we are grateful for the debate, most of us are starting to think about what will happen beyond it and in particular what means are available to hold those responsible for the disaster to account. The only people who have thus far lost their jobs in this whole calamity are two BBC journalists. I am sure that the public are now appalled and sickened after listening to Tony Blair—his defiance of the report, his lack of contrition and his half-hearted meaningless apology, with no recognition of the scale of the disaster. Will the Leader of the House explain what means and methods we have to hold those responsible to account in this House?

Although we are having two days of debate on the last Labour Government's era-defining disaster, we still have not had one on this Government's one. In the two weeks since this country made the decision on the European Union there has been no Government-sponsored debate on the EU referendum or Brexit. It is almost a dereliction of duty. I do not know whether it is a case of denial from the Government or they genuinely do not have a clue, although I suspect it is a combination of the two.

This morning we have heard all sorts of rumours on social media about a decision on Trident. Will the Leader of the House now explain when we will have the vote on Trident rather than leaving it to rumour and hearsay?

Lastly, may we have a debate on the overthrow of elites, in political parties in particular? This morning I looked up the definition of coup. Apparently it is the sudden appropriation of leadership or power and its replacement by other elites within the state apparatus. Today there is almost a physical boundary on the Opposition Benches between the two sides of the Labour party—we can see the barrier there. The chicken coupers must be the most inept coupers ever: no strategy, no challenger, just spineless inertia, with the vain hope that their Front-Bench team will somehow just go. Let us have that debate and see whether they can learn from the hand of history.

**Chris Grayling**: On the Chilcot report, I reiterate that it is right and proper that we have a two-day debate. That is the job of this House. It is not for this House to consider whether there are specific measures that can be taken against individuals. That is a matter for the relevant authorities, and it is not for us as a Parliament to debate those matters. There will be plenty of opportunity for this House to express its opinions about the role played by individuals and organisations in that process and that decision making. Sir John Chilcot has provided for everyone in this House a detailed range of information that can be drawn on for that debate, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will play an active part in it.

On the EU referendum, the country has just had a four-month debate, and we have had a verdict from the United Kingdom. I know the hon. Gentleman still cannot get to grips with the fact that we are part of the United Kingdom together. I value being part of the United Kingdom Parliament with him. He adds something

[Chris Grayling]

extra to this institution, and long may that continue. We have just had a very lengthy debate on the referendum. There are plenty of opportunities to debate this—virtually every day at oral questions and when the Prime Minister is here. We have had statements on the outcome of the referendum, we have had Opposition day debates, and we will be debating the matter for some months to come.

As I have been clear over the months, we will have a debate on the future of Trident, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that when we are ready to announce the date for that, we will do so to this House.

The hon. Gentleman mentions the overthrow of elites. It is nice to find something on which we have a common view. Until he mentioned it, I had not spotted the completely empty row on the Labour Benches, but it is a bit surreal. It is as if the whole thing has turned upside down. [Interruption.] It is like “Alice Through the Looking Glass”—the Front Benchers have moved to the Back Bench, and the Back Benchers have moved to the Front Bench. Who would ever have imagined the Front-Bench team that we see there now? Never in our wildest imagination did we imagine that the Labour Opposition could find themselves in such a predicament. The hon. Gentleman is right—they cannot even organise their own coup or their own leadership contest. If they cannot do that, they are utterly unfit ever to run the country.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): I rise on behalf of the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who is attending the opening of a section of the A1M. Unfortunately, the A1M was built over a disused mine shaft and a 30-foot sinkhole has appeared, but don't worry—officials are looking into it.

As a consequence of the two-day debate on the Chilcot report, a Back-Bench business day has been lost. On behalf of the Backbench Business Committee, may I ask the Leader of the House to confirm as soon as possible that 21 July, the last sitting day before we rise, will be allotted to the Backbench Business Committee so that we can publicise the pre-recess Adjournment debates?

I speak now on my own behalf. An excellent report was published this week by the Royal Commonwealth Society on introducing two-year visas for people from India. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate in Government time on visa requirements for people from India and other countries outside the European Union so that we can grasp the opportunities to set and control our own borders?

**Chris Grayling:** On the earlier point, we will do everything we can to make sure that we provide information about allocated days in a timely way and that we make provision for the Backbench Business Committee, as is normal. My hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that the Government felt that next week it is important to have the debate on the Chilcot report and to have that debate across a two-day period. I hope the Backbench Business Committee will understand that.

With regard to visas, I am sure that the Home Secretary will have noted the points that my hon. Friend makes. It is important now, given the decision that this country has taken to leave the European Union, that we maximise

the opportunities that we have to forge free trade links around the world. It is encouraging that a number of our Commonwealth friends in particular have come forward and said that they believe that free trade arrangements between us and them will be beneficial for the future.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I thank the Government for producing a written statement on cremations and baby ashes, and I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice for her work on that issue. I also thank Action for Ashes, and my constituent, Tina Trowhill, and other families up and down the land who are involved with this matter. Will the Leader of the House have a word with the three Cabinet Ministers who wrote to Hull City Council to ask it to hold a local inquiry into baby ashes in the Hull area? The chief executive of the council wrote back to ask for clarification on the terms of reference, and whether any financial support was available to pay for the local inquiry. We have not yet received a response, and families want to get the matter under way as soon as possible.

**Chris Grayling:** This is a deeply sensitive issue, and I pay tribute to those families who have been brave enough to campaign for an improved situation, given the difficulties they have been through. I will certainly chase up that response for the hon. Lady, and try to ensure that it is sent as quickly as possible.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): One thing that unites this House is the abhorrence of modern slavery. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK, of which I am chairman, is working on a report on that issue. However, the funding we need is being held up by the Home Office, so we have not done it. The work done by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) has been superb over many years. In the absence of receiving that money, could we have a debate in Government time to discuss an issue that I know brings the House together, so that we can send a united voice across the world to say that we do not approve of modern slavery and that the entire House says that it must stop now?

**Chris Grayling:** Members across the House should be proud that this country passed the Modern Slavery Act 2015, and we have taken a lead on this issue. My hon. Friend's work with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) in an area where there is no political difference and on which we are politically united is an example of this House at its best. We are often only seen by the public debating with each other in a lively way, but great work takes place across the House, and long may it continue.

**Mr John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): In the light of Brexit, I asked all Departments what steps they are taking to ensure that their purchasing policies support British industry and agriculture. The reply, which was centrally generated by the Government although it came from a number of Departments, stated:

“The Department's purchasing policies support the Government's commitment to do all it can to ensure UK suppliers can compete effectively for public sector contracts, in line with our current international obligations and guidance issued by the Crown Commercial Service.”

That is a totally inadequate response to the situation we are facing. Clearly, the civil service still does not get it. May we have a debate to explore how we will back British industry, British agriculture and British workers?

**Chris Grayling:** The Government have given the right hon. Gentleman a legally accurate response to the current situation. When we have left the European Union, we will be freer to take decisions about procurement in the United Kingdom and the services, goods and products produced here. I am a great believer in doing everything we can to procure locally, but we are subject to procurement rules with which we must conform.

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): Whether west, east or sub-Saharan Africa, Commonwealth or non-Commonwealth, the world's fastest growing economies are on that continent. May we have a debate about what more the Government can do to reach out to those growing economies?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and we should all be pleased with the way that the African continent is developing. More and more people are being lifted out of poverty, and there is more economic development. We have historic ties with many of those countries, and we should seek to strengthen those ties in a variety of ways, including the development of free trade deals with them in the future.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): May we have a debate or statement on justice for all war widows? An anomaly means that those whose partners died in service between 1973 and 2005 are not able to claim the war widows pension if they remarry. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) recently hosted a protest at which that issue was highlighted, and it is an important matter, especially in the week of the Chilcot report.

**Chris Grayling:** All hon. Members would want to support war widows. The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point and I will ensure that his concerns are raised with the Ministry of Defence after business questions.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): The European Union, including the United Kingdom, recognises a difference between the military and political wings of Hezbollah, but such a distinction does not appear to be recognised by the organisation itself. Therefore, in the light of the confusion about the legality of demonstrators displaying Hezbollah flags on the streets of London last Sunday, may we have a statement on the legality of displaying them and any flag associated with a proscribed terrorist organisation?

**Chris Grayling:** I agree with my hon. Friend that if an organisation is proscribed in the UK, it should not be allowed to publicise itself in the UK, whether through flags, placards or anything else. I will ensure that the Home Secretary is aware of the concerns he raises. If an organisation is illegal in the UK, it should not manifest itself in the UK.

**Robert Flello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): For too long, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media have become more and more like the wild west, with

people thinking they can post anything and say anything. My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) has a private Member's Bill, but we need the Government to take much more drastic action, because the problem is spilling out into the wider world, as has been said previously. May we have a statement or a debate in Government time about what they will do both to tackle Twitter, Facebook and other forums, and to clamp down on what is happening in the public realm?

**Chris Grayling:** This is an issue for Members on both sides of the House and I share the hon. Gentleman's view, but it is not simply about Members of Parliament—it also affects people in society. I have a more straightforward view than his. It is very simple: if Members of the House or other people receive threats that they are going to be raped, murdered or whatever, the police should arrest the perpetrators and put them in court. That might send a message to those who carry out that kind of disgraceful behaviour that there are consequences. My message to our police is: if that happens, prosecute.

**Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): When it comes to sport, my constituency is best known for the game associated with the oval ball, but we have some great football teams, including Rugby Town juniors, who have just received a grant of £371,000 from Sport England towards a 3G astroturf pitch for use by their 700 or so members. The Leader of the House has praised the achievements of the Wales team, but may we have a debate on how investment in grassroots football of the type taking place in Rugby can inspire our national team at the highest level?

**Chris Grayling:** No English Member is in any doubt this week that we need a strong grassroots youth development system for the future. Having been outshone by the Welsh, we would like to get our own back at some point, but we definitely need new young players to come through. We know that from our strongest local, non-league and amateur clubs can come stars of the future. Let us hope some of them come from Rugby.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I thank the Leader of the House for his warm tribute to the achievements of the Welsh national football team. I tweeted last night that I will die a happy man, hopefully many years from now, having had the privilege of supporting that great Welsh national side.

Last month, the people of the UK took probably the most important political decision in my lifetime, and I turned 40 in April, yet over lunch yesterday, I had a discussion with Speaker Boothroyd, who informed me that the other place has had two days of debates on the implications of Brexit. When will the House have the opportunity to debate the implications? The fact that there is no plan to deal with what has happened in the last month is no reason to sweep it under the carpet.

**Chris Grayling:** I simply assure the hon. Gentleman that there will be plenty of opportunities in the coming months for us to debate these matters. We need to elect a new Prime Minister, complete the preparatory work, start negotiations and ensure that the House has every opportunity to debate those matters. I give him that absolute assurance.

[Chris Grayling]

I have one regret on the football front. As a Manchester United supporter, I just wish Gareth Bale would come home and join the reds.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): The Kurdish peshmerga have very much been at the front line of the battle against Daesh in northern Iraq, and I am proud that the Government have supported them militarily, but may we have a debate on the medical support that is needed by injured fighters against Daesh, including our allies in the peshmerga and others?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We clearly need to do more than simply provide military support. A huge amount of humanitarian effort is going in to support those affected by the war, but I will ensure that the Secretary of State for International Development is aware of his concern so that it can be a focus.

**Mr Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): We have reached the end of the track in terms of my constituents' patience with one of the worst train operating companies in the world, Govia Thameslink Railway, which runs Thameslink and Southern lines that are currently masquerading as train services. In its latest attempt to reduce disruption on the Southern line, it is going to cancel up to 350 trains. That is simply unacceptable. It is causing people to lose their jobs, students to miss exams and untold stress. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Transport Secretary to come and give an urgent statement, and for goodness sake strip this company of this franchise and do so now?

**Chris Grayling:** May I say first of all that, as someone who also shares GTR routes, I am well aware of the issue? I have every sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has just said and I have constituents who share his anger. There is a debate on this matter in Westminster Hall next week. I have already spoken to the rail Minister, who is acutely aware of the issue. What is happening at the moment is simply unacceptable and has to be sorted out.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Parts of my constituency are being blighted by young men driving high-performance luxury vehicles, often at dangerously high speeds. There have been a series of accidents, near misses and hit-and-runs in recent months. As most of these vehicles are hired, usually for just a day at a time, local residents and Pendle Council are calling for action to prevent hire car companies from putting high performance supercars in the hands of young drivers. Will my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on this issue?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I am surprised the hire companies want to do that, because high-performance cars tend to be high-value cars and I presume they want to get them back intact afterwards. It is clearly a bizarre situation and I do not know why those businesses are taking the approach he describes. He should certainly put pressure on them locally, but I will make sure his concerns are drawn to the attention of the Transport Secretary.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Those of us who are regular, proper Back Benchers value business questions. I hope the Leader of the House will have a word with the other Front Benchers and bring it back to what it should be about: business questions. We had a Welsh shadow Leader of the House who could not even mention the Welsh team today, which I think he should have done, but business questions is for important future business. My constituents are deeply worried about the closure of the A&E at Huddersfield Royal Infirmary. That is of prime importance. They are worried about the quality of management by GPs who become managers in clinical commissioning groups. Those are the sorts of things we want a debate on and we want it soon.

**Chris Grayling:** I am not sure whether to congratulate, or commiserate with the hon. Gentleman on the fact that he is still on the Back Benches. Only he will be able to tell us whether he has been offered a job as, for example, shadow Education Secretary. I know it has been a challenge to fill that post recently.

**Mr Sheerman** *indicated dissent.*

**Chris Grayling:** Well that is a bit of a snub, isn't it? The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about his constituency. I have been a champion of A&E and maternity services in my constituency. Regular opportunities exist through Adjournment debates and Backbench Business debates to bring a Minister before the House. With his long experience, he knows how best to use those systems to get Ministers here and hold them to account.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): The changing face of retail is having a major impact on the vibrancy of our town centres. We do not want a situation in which our provincial towns becoming derelict with more empty shop units. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on how the Government will support local authorities to regenerate provincial town centres?

**Chris Grayling:** The big thing we have done this year is to change business rates, which I hope will make a difference in places like Cleethorpes. My hon. Friend and I have walked up the main street in Cleethorpes on many occasions. It is a great town. It is a really important part of the community and the area he represents. I hope the changes we have made to business rates will help to strengthen the businesses in that high street. I also hope we get some good weather, so that Cleethorpes fills with tourists in the coming six weeks.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Last week, when I challenged the Leader of the House, he yet again defended the rights of the more than 800 unelected bureaucrats in the place next door. He has previously defended the voting system in this place yet this morning, with no sense of irony, he talks about making this place suitable for a modern democracy. Therefore, in the vein of a modern democracy, I will narrow it down a wee bit. Will he make a statement outlining why he thinks it is appropriate to have 26 Church of England bishops taking part in the legislative process, and why they are able to vote on legislation that affects Scotland?

**Chris Grayling:** The thing that puzzles me is that the Scottish National party has a substantial number of private Members' Bills opportunities, having been in the top 10 in this year's draw. Has there been a Bill to make any change whatever to the House of Lords? No.

**Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con):** On Tuesday evening, a Bath mum, Kerry Parkinson, was travelling home and was hit in the face after confronting a passenger who told their son to "Shut up, or we will send you to Istanbul with the other Muslims to join Isis." I am sure that whole House will join me in condemning such disgusting racist views and in congratulating Kerry on standing up against hate. Will my right hon. Friend speak to the Home Secretary to see what more can be done to tackle xenophobia in our society and look at staging further debates in the House?

**Chris Grayling:** That instance is absolutely shocking. We send all our good wishes to my hon. Friend's constituent for what she has done. Let us be absolutely clear: the Muslim community plays a valuable role in our communities up and down the country. The Muslim community is full of people who have made a real difference to our society, and we should support them. The fact that there are a small number of people in the Islamic world who pursue an ideology of hate that we all stand up against should not in any way tarnish the good, hard-working decent Muslims of this country. We should abhor, tackle and prosecute insults and attacks against them.

**Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab):** Some 5% of students and 15% of staff at British universities come from other EU countries, along with £800 million a year in research grants. Our universities are deeply worried about the impact of Brexit on their future academic competitiveness, and in cities like Nottingham our universities play a vital role in the success of the local economy. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the Business Secretary makes an urgent statement on how he intends to protect our higher education sector in the negotiations on Britain's withdrawal from the EU?

**Chris Grayling:** I will of course ensure that what the hon. Lady says is drawn to the attention of the Business Secretary. Let me make two points. First, particularly in science where these issues have been raised, the European science network, which is a partnership of academic institutions across Europe, includes countries such as Israel that are not part of the European Union in any way, shape or form. There is no reason why our universities cannot continue to play the part they do today in joint international research projects. Secondly, it is worth remembering that we pay a substantial amount of money into the European Union. In future, that money will not be paid, and there is no reason why we cannot continue to provide the money directly and cut out the middle man.

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** When we discuss Brexit, may we have the opportunity of conducting some sectional debates, so that we can look at how, now that the power exists for Parliament to vote through renationalising the rail industries, we could rejuvenate football as well—and not just the English football team? The Bosman ruling

will be abolished, which will allow local football clubs in England and Scotland to rejuvenate themselves rather lose all their best players to the premier league.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman, of course, comes to the issue of Britain's future outside the European Union from a different perspective from mine, but he highlights how, once we have left, we will be able to do in the future the things that we are constrained from doing now. On Bosman and English football, of course we want to see a new generation of bright young players coming through—and possibly from Rugby, as we heard earlier.

**Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** We learned yesterday about five walk-outs from five separate prisons in the last five months by prison officers who do not feel safe at work. There has been a 30% increase in serious assaults on staff this year. With so much else going on, it is easy to ignore that, but the Leader of House cannot ignore it because he largely caused the problem. Will he get the Justice Secretary, who should have more time on his hands after today, to come and make a statement about why we cannot get right something as fundamental as security and safety in our prisons and the protection of prisoners and prison staff from harm?

**Chris Grayling:** I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that the current structure of staffing in prisons was designed by the Prison Officers Association and the Prison Governors Association three years ago. What we implemented was their advice about how to proceed to staff our prisons.

**Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP):** Last week, Aberdeen City Council held a summit on the problems in the oil and gas industry. The Government managed to appear via a 30-minute video link, but no Government Minister was sent. The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) is currently chasing her leadership ambitions and might be doing so for the next couple of months, so can the Government give a commitment that somebody in government will, in view of the current rocky climate, give more than passing attention to the oil industry?

**Chris Grayling:** Absolutely. The oil industry is very important to us. I know that in recent months the Chancellor, in particular, has taken an active interest in how we can best ease the pressures on it, but when the oil price has fallen to such a degree, there are no easy solutions.

**Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab):** May we have an urgent statement on Care.data? The Government announced today that they were scrapping the scheme. We need to know how much it cost the public purse, and whether all our constituents' information will be shredded.

**Chris Grayling:** I will ensure that the hon. Lady receives a response from the Department of Health.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** The issue of forced organ harvesting in China has concerned us for some time. It involves people who have been jailed for campaigning for civil liberties, for being Christians and

[*Jim Shannon*]

practising their religion, or for following the meditation practices of Falun Gong, which is a wonderful form of meditation whose values are truth, compassion and tolerance. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate, in the Chamber or in Westminster Hall, on the horrific, brutal surgical removal of vital organs from prisoners of conscience, and could we also debate the issue of organ tourism? People travel from the United Kingdom to China to receive those organs. I believe that a subject of such importance should be debated.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman has raised a very serious issue. He will be able to raise it directly with the Foreign Secretary during Foreign Office questions on Tuesday, but let me say to him now that, while we seek to engage with China and strengthen our partnerships with it, we always take opportunities to raise the question of human rights, and we want to see standards of human rights in China improve.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) asked about yesterday's decision to scrap the Care.data scheme. Experts say that access to patient data is vital to better understanding of the causes of disease. It should be possible both to get data security right and to give researchers access to data. We really need to discuss this issue in the House.

**Chris Grayling:** I will ensure that the Health Secretary is aware of the concerns that have been raised. It is clearly important for us to protect individual data, as it always has been, but I will ask Ministers to give a proper response to both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz).

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Several constituents have contacted me in the last month about ridiculous delays in assessments for employment and support allowance. Some have been waiting not for the 13 weeks for which they should be waiting, but for as long as eight or even 11 months. Given the importance of the issue to the lives of my constituents and their ability to feed themselves, may we have a debate in Government time about how long the process is taking and what is going wrong with the Department involved?

**Chris Grayling:** Fortunately, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will be here on Monday for oral questions. I will alert him in advance, and if the hon. Lady wants to raise the issue in the House again, I will ask him to provide her with a proper response.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): On this very poignant anniversary, I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in expressing gratitude to our incredible emergency services, who are simply the best in the world. However, I am alarmed to learn that cuts in our fire services now pose a real threat to public safety, and that, following the cutting of more than 7,000 firefighters since 2010, response times are at their longest for more than 20 years. May we have an urgent further debate on the issue?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to our emergency services. Yes, there have been changes, and there have been improvements.

One of the changes that is taking place at the moment is a move to bring fire services together with local police services under the umbrella of the police and crime commissioners, because we think that will achieve efficiencies, both operational and financial. Obviously I will ensure that the Department is aware of the hon. Lady's concern, but she may choose to initiate an end-of-day Adjournment debate so that a Minister can deal with the issue directly.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating John Whitgift Academy on securing a People's Postcode lottery grant so that it can lead and inspire young people through the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's On Track to Achieve programme? That will give an important boost to pupils and teachers in a school that was recently given an "inadequate" rating by Ofsted. May we have an urgent debate on the importance of sport and sport mentoring in schools?

**Chris Grayling:** Let me begin by paying tribute to the hon. Lady for what she did as shadow Leader of the House. We on these Benches are sorry to see her move back three rows, but I am sure that she will not be in that row forever—unless things carry on as they are. I also pay tribute to those in her constituency who are doing so much work for young people and sporting achievement, which makes such a difference to their development. The work she has described is enormously valuable.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Recent NHS figures show that 142 people per 100,000 in Manchester die prematurely from cardiovascular diseases. Someone is more likely to die prematurely from a heart attack or a stroke in Manchester than anywhere else in the country. May we have a debate on how to address high rates of cardiovascular disease in cities such as Manchester?

**Chris Grayling:** That is a very good example of why Manchester will benefit from having greater control over healthcare services in the area as a result of our devolution package. There are clearly particular problems that are found in some of our great cities, and devolution of responsibility to those cities will enable local solutions to be put in place that can make a difference.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): This week, the European Commission announced that national Parliaments will be given the chance to vote on the comprehensive economic and trade agreement with Canada. Can the Leader of the House give any further detail on when Members of this place can expect to debate, scrutinise and vote on this important deal?

**Chris Grayling:** No, I cannot do that as yet. This is a long and convoluted process. I very much hope that in future we will be able to conclude trade agreements in a much quicker time frame, in a way that benefits our economy.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): It has come to my attention that a private memo has been sent by the Department for Work and Pensions to the work capability

assessment providers warning them not to direct claimants to appeal against decisions wrongfully made on their entitlements. It is clear as day that it is critical that benefit claimants can access appeal rights, and indeed claim their benefits, where they are so entitled. May we have a debate on this issue to ensure that these restrictive policies are not being enforced by the DWP?

**Chris Grayling:** I understand the concern that the hon. Gentleman raises. The Secretary of State will be here for questions on Monday, and I suggest that he puts his point directly to Ministers at that session.

**Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab):** Is it possible for the Leader of the House to organise an urgent debate, in Government time, on prosecution policy? Over the past few weeks, we have seen a disgraceful rise in the number of race hate crime incidents, as we heard from the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett). It is quite right that we all abhor that, but do we not need to take a stand as a society and prosecute people who take part in such behaviour? It is not enough to be angry and to say that we abhor it; these people need to be brought before the courts and prosecuted, and that will help to stop it.

**Chris Grayling:** I wholly agree with the hon. Gentleman. One of the most extraordinary things is that British Asians, who have had nothing whatever to do with the debates in recent weeks, should be singled out in this way. That is a sign of a streak of opinion in our society. I believe that we are as tolerant a society as any in the world, but we none the less have a core of people whose beliefs are disgraceful and whose actions are disgraceful, and when they act in the way that we have seen in recent weeks, there is absolutely no excuse for our police and our prosecuting authorities not to put them in court where they belong.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** We now come to the Select Committee statement. Dr Julian Lewis will speak on his subject for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Dr Julian Lewis to respond to those in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

## Russia: Implications for UK Defence and Security

### SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE

#### *Select Committee statement*

11.18 am

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** I am grateful for this opportunity to lay before the House the Defence Committee's new report entitled, "Russia: Implications for UK defence and security", which has been produced on the eve of the Warsaw NATO summit and which highlights the need for that major event to focus on defence and deterrence, but also on dialogue.

I am extremely grateful to all the members of the Defence Committee for their contributions to the genesis of this report. We held four oral evidence sessions and received 18 pieces of written evidence. A delegation from the Committee, ably led by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray), visited Moscow, where they attempted to engage with the Russian authorities. Because of the current state of relations, Russian Government authorities were reluctant to engage, but the delegation acquired much other useful information on that visit.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine have undermined the post-cold war assumption of a stable Europe in which the military threat to NATO is low. The north Atlantic alliance must therefore restore its defences, review its deterrence and reopen its dialogue with the Russian authorities. The fact that NATO and the UK were taken by surprise by the interventions in Ukraine shows a failure to comprehend President Putin's determination to maintain a sphere of influence beyond Russia's own borders and to do so by force if necessary. His stance directly contradicts the rules-based international order that western democracies seek to promote.

Russia has become increasingly active not only in conventional warfare, but in unconventional methods, often deniable, which are designed to fall below the threshold that would trigger NATO's article 5 guarantee—the undertaking to consider an armed attack against one NATO member state as an attack against them all. The creation of the very high readiness joint taskforce—VJTF—among NATO member states and the enhanced forward presence on NATO's contested eastern flank are steps in the right direction, but our report warns that the VJTF was formed only recently and that its capacity to deploy the necessary forces within the required timeframe is as yet unproven.

The report's recommendations include the following. First, the MOD should recognise the extent of Russian remilitarisation and respond to it robustly. Secondly, it should review the effectiveness of current deterrence policy against nuclear, conventional and hybrid or multidimensional warfare. Thirdly, NATO should determine whether the 1987 intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty is in need of repair or replacement in the light of allegations that Russia has breached its provisions. Fourthly, a timetable should be set out for the Trident Successor submarine debate and the decision in Parliament "without further delay"—indeed, that debate should be held before the summer recess. Fifthly, the renewal of EU-wide

[*Dr Julian Lewis*]

sanctions against Russia should be encouraged and possibly extended to a larger group among the Kremlin leadership. Sixthly, it should be accepted that

“it is perfectly possible to confront and constrain an adversary in a region where our interests clash, whilst cooperating with him, to some degree, in a region where they coincide.”

We regard the threat posed by Daesh, al-Qaeda and other international terrorists as a relevant example of the latter: the convergence, to a considerable extent, of NATO and Russian interests. I am glad to see the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr Brazier), assenting to that proposition.

The Committee believes that Russian cyber-attacks across Europe and territorial seizures in Georgia and Ukraine may not be isolated actions and may be symptomatic of a wider ambition to restore Moscow’s global influence. However, because Russia is a global power, there remain opportunities for co-operation if we can but grasp them. Yet with relations at what the Russian ambassador to London has described as an “all time low”, our report concludes that the UK must urgently boost its cadre of Russian specialists. We must restore and maintain a high level of expertise for the foreseeable future. Given the current climate, the defence attaché’s office in Moscow, for example, must be properly staffed by the end of the year.

Since the end of the cold war, Russia has not been a UK priority and our expertise in this field has withered on the vine. The UK needs a vastly strengthened body of experts who can help provide an effective response to the challenges Russia now poses. We cannot hope to understand Russia without a forthright dialogue, and in the current conditions of mistrust we run the risk of blundering into conflicts that may be preventable through better communication. The cold war was characterised not only by military confrontation, but by the then Soviet Union’s promotion of Marxism-Leninism, with its formidable appeal to impressionable minds inside the Kremlin’s targeted countries. No such totalitarian doctrine applies to present-day Russia, which, for all its nationalist and expansionist tendencies, is itself under threat from revolutionary Islamism, the brutal successor to the equally brutal Nazi and communist creeds which blighted so much of the 20th century. Therein lies the basis for potential co-operation, provided that our dialogue with Russia is from a position of strength, based on sound defences and credible deterrence.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): May I say that it is a privilege to serve on the Defence Committee, which is so ably chaired by the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)? I hope he will agree that one thing that is clear from our report is a lack of dialogue and understanding between our colleagues in Russia and ourselves, in terms of not only language, but shared history. Does he agree that, in the light of the upcoming NATO summit, we need to review that as part of our wider engagement with Russia, including how it perceives the threat from NATO, too?

**Dr Lewis:** Yes, indeed, and I thank the hon. Lady for that. She is a tremendously supportive member of the Committee; this is her first parliamentary term, but she

has made a great start. I re-emphasise what I said about the importance of dialogue with Russia. The fact remains that different societies develop at different stages and go through different phases in their attitude to their relationships with the rest of the world. One mistake that the west clearly made after the downfall of communism was to evoke a degree of triumphalism at a time when magnanimity would have been more appropriate. Those in the west make a terrible mistake if they fail to recognise that Russia is and always has been a great power, and what we have to do is reach out the hand of friendship, while trying to discourage those aspects of the Russian tradition that seek to dominate lands beyond its own borders. Russia is a pretty large landmass and one would hope that the Russians could make a success of running their own country without feeling the need to impose their will on their neighbours.

**Mr James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): Potential Russian expansionism must be deterred by NATO with a fist of steel—there is no question about that, as we cannot let them do it—but one encased in a velvet glove. At the moment, we do not understand Russia and what it is doing. We must find better ways of understanding the Russians and talking to them about it. Does my right hon. Friend agree that one area where we simply do not know what they are doing is in the high north—in the Arctic? Russia is, without question, expanding its military capabilities up there and we do not quite know why. Does he agree that that was one area the report was not able to look into, and is there not room for further work on that?

**Dr Lewis:** I agree with every word my hon. Friend has said. Our report drops a very broad hint that the Arctic—the high north—deserves special attention, and I strongly suspect that if and when the Committee takes a decision to give it that special attention, my hon. Friend, who has led the way, with his all-party group for polar regions, in alerting the country to the significance of this area, will be playing a very prominent part indeed.

**Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): First, let me thank the right hon. Gentleman and his fellow Committee members for a comprehensive and thorough report on this important area of the UK’s and Europe’s defence and security. I note that this inquiry did not have time to consider the implications of Brexit in full. However, given that the Putin regime’s tactics are often geared towards destabilising Europe as a whole, does he agree that it is vital for the UK to ensure, particularly at the upcoming Warsaw summit, that Brexit does not undermine the political cohesion of NATO? I am going to assume that the answer to that is yes. As such, has the Committee given any preliminary thoughts as to how this might come about?

**Dr Lewis:** I welcome the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) to his new responsibilities. May I say a personal message of appreciation for his past service in the Territorial Army, which included a spell of active service in Afghanistan? I hold the members of the armed forces, particularly those who have seen active service in dangerous parts of the world, in the highest respect. I am sure that we will all listen with very great attention to his contributions.

In relation to the implications of Brexit, I do not think that I am giving up any trade secrets when I say that that has been discussed as one of the major strands of the forthcoming work of the Committee. It is certainly the case that there should be no need for anyone to feel that security arrangements have been undermined in any way if only because of the almost complete overlap between the membership of the EU and the membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. I am quite certain that the structures of NATO will be perfectly capable of carrying forward the security relationships without any form of distortion by any other organisation that might have been tempted to duplicate them. NATO will indeed be one of the principal forums for ensuring that the communications that are so important between the United Kingdom and our friends and allies on the continent will be able to proceed absolutely uninterruptedly as a result of the change that will take place.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Julian Brazier):** May I also welcome the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) to his new role, and say that we served in the same reserve infantry unit, although, unlike me, he saw active service during his time there?

I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his Committee on a heavyweight report. Clearly, we will be responding to it, and we will look carefully at each of the recommendations. It is above my pay grade to give a date for the Trident debate, but we will be looking carefully at it. May I congratulate the Committee on the very careful balance that it has struck between stressing the real and growing dangers from the Soviet Union—sorry, that was a Freudian slip; I meant from Russia—and stressing the political situation that exists now as compared with the old Soviet Union? I am talking about the lack of ideology now, and the fact that that may provide us with some constructive opportunities, particularly as we share a horrid threat from Daesh.

**Dr Lewis:** I am very grateful to the Minister for his encouraging remarks. He is spot on when he says that we must take a balanced view with regard to Russia. If we look back over the history of Anglo-Russian relations throughout the 20th century, we will see that they are terrible switchback rides of periods of great hostility and then close alliance and then great hostility once again. It is a pity—I will put it no more strongly than that—that we cannot order our affairs to see that, in reality, there are prospects for co-operation between developed powers that vastly outweigh any sectional advantage that might be sought by one of them trying to steal a march on the other. I understand the reasons why Russia feels affronted by its treatment after the end of the cold war, but that is no excuse for ripping up the international rule book and trampling on the rights of its neighbours.

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** May I commend the Chairman and the members of his Committee for producing an excellent report in the run-up to the NATO summit later this week? I entirely agree with the need for more dialogue and co-operation through the NATO-Russia Council and by other means, and also with the Committee's recommendation about recognising the Russian threat and the need to respond to it robustly. In that context, does the Chairman of the Committee

share my concern about the recent remarks by the German Foreign Minister who described the recent 10-day NATO exercise in Poland as “warmongering” and “counterproductive” to regional security? Is there not a need for the member states of NATO to stand together and send a united clear message to Putin that we will not be divided? More work needs to be done by our own Government and other like-minded Governments to ensure that everybody recognises the need to stand united, otherwise Putin will exploit the differences.

**Dr Lewis:** I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern. This is why some of us—I speak more personally in this respect—have been worried about the creation of a separate defence identity in Europe outside the NATO arena. What he says is entirely right: NATO is the forum in which our security concerns should be aired with our European friends, neighbours and allies. We should try to arrive at a unified perceptions of the situation and articulate them appropriately.

**Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con):** May I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his Committee on producing an excellent and timely report? Does he agree that we have seen recently that President Putin has been able to exploit our weaknesses, that he does so ruthlessly and that he has been able to act with impunity? As chairman of the all-party Ukraine group, I am particularly conscious of his flouting of the Budapest memorandum of 1996, and he has done that with complete impunity. He respects strength, so it is absolutely right that NATO is reinforcing its position in the Baltic states. That is a demonstration of strength and resolve on the part of NATO. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is capabilities, not intentions, that count? Intentions can change overnight; capabilities cannot. Particularly today, given the complexity of modern defence technology, we cannot produce aircraft, tanks and ships overnight. Therefore, NATO's upcoming meeting should focus on delivering the extra spending to deliver the capabilities.

I strongly applaud my right hon. Friend's argument about dialogue. I had a meeting with the Russian ambassador here in London, and I said, “We have a common interest. Our common interest is that we are both facing Islamic fundamentalism, and that is where we need to co-operate.” Will my right hon. Friend therefore share with the House how he thinks we can not only show that we have absolute determination and resolve in resisting Putin's advances but engage with him and his Government? Where else might we do so apart from on the mutual threat that we face from Islamic fundamentalism?

**Dr Lewis:** What a cornucopia of questions, but all of them typically sound and well directed, given my hon. Friend's distinguished record in the field of defence and security. I believe that there is nothing new about the dilemma of how we gauge our relations with the Russians. I remember in my years as a researcher coming across a paper by the joint intelligence sub-committee—it was then a sub-committee of the chiefs of staff—called “Relations with the Russians”, which was written in 1945, and it said then exactly what we are saying today: “They respect you if you stand up to them, if you show you're strong, but if you engage with them as well. They do not respect you if you give signs of weakness.”

[Dr Julian Lewis]

I believe that there is a shared threat, but there are potential threats that Russia is beginning to show, once again, towards its most immediate neighbours, and that is why it is important that there is a NATO military presence in the most vulnerable front-line states, particularly the Baltic states and Poland. Russia must be left in no doubt that NATO membership means that article 5 applies, and article 5 means that there should be no question of Russia thinking that it can pick off any weaker or more exposed NATO member state and that the other NATO countries will not come to its aid. That is why, conversely, we must be careful not to extend NATO membership or article 5 guarantees to countries where it is simply not realistic to believe that NATO would go to war to defend them.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. We are quite a lot over time now, so I am going to ask for very short, very quick questions, but also very short, very quick answers.

**Douglas Chapman** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): We spent most of yesterday discussing the political and military miscalculation and misadventure in Iraq. We hope a debate on Trident looms large, but the report emphasises the need to consider the cost-effectiveness, desirability and affordability of the Successor programme. In the light of Brexit and the financial uncertainty it might bring, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are many approaches and non-nuclear deterrents we could introduce to create stability with Russia, but that Trident skews every single defence budget to unacceptable levels? Its extension could lead to a financial miscalculation and to a military misadventure that would make Iraq look like a bit of a walk in the park.

**Dr Lewis:** Bearing in mind your instruction to be concise, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will just share with the House what the hon. Gentleman said to me when he first joined the Committee. He said, “Julian, you and I are never going to agree about the nuclear deterrent, but I am sure we can co-operate to mutual advantage on many other defence issues,” and he has been as good as his word. I respect his concerns and his doubts about the Trident Successor programme, and I am sure that the sooner we have the debate, the sooner we will be able to engage in the arguments.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the right hon. Gentleman on his chairmanship and leadership of the Defence Committee. When I think of Russia, I think of the saying, “Speak softly, but carry a big stick”—in other words, we have to have dialogue, but we also have to be able to respond. One of the concerns I and the Committee have is about the National Guard, which comes under the direct control of the President—in other words, he can use it to combat terrorism and organised crime but also to control protests. Does the Chairman share the concern I and many others have

that President Putin is no longer prepared to tolerate any opposition whatever? Do we also need to look at the ability of NATO and the British Army to respond quickly? Russia can respond within 24 hours or 48 hours, but we seem to take at least another three days. It is critical that we can engage with Russia on those two issues at every level to make sure we protect our people.

**Dr Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman makes an enormous and extremely valuable contribution to the work of the Committee, and I agree with him: the announcement of the creation of this new National Guard, which can muster hundreds of thousands of troops, according to some reports, but which, interestingly enough, also includes special forces, is a cause for concern. As it is directly responsible to the President, one can only wonder whether it has something to do with shoring up his position domestically, as well as with exerting power beyond Russia’s borders. The report says—I mentioned this in my statement—that the creation of the very high readiness joint taskforce is a step in the right direction, but the numbers that can be generated at short notice by the Russian armed forces seem to be substantially in excess of what NATO could generate now or in the immediate future, and we need to be able to do better in the medium and long terms.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I welcome the report, but I do get concerned when I hear Russia being spoken of in a certain fashion in the House and, critically, when we do not speak of the communities in Russia, who have to live with the daily experience of the Russian state.

It is now clear that the Russian Federation views the United Kingdom’s global strength as profoundly weakened not only by the issues raised in the Committee’s report, but by Brexit. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the lack of investigation by the Committee into the consequences of Brexit was an oversight and only gives succour to the idea in the Kremlin that the United Kingdom does not have a Scooby what it is doing when it comes to working with like-minded European nations to deal with the profound threats posed by the Russian Federation?

**Dr Lewis:** What a pleasure it is, after all those very supportive questions, to be able to say that I utterly disagree with the question that has just been asked. When did Brexit occur? It was a matter of days ago, but the Committee is to be coruscated and condemned because it has not already carried out a full-scale investigation of the consequences of something that the hon. Gentleman was hoping would never happen. Some of us hoped that it would happen, although I must say that a majority on the Committee hoped that it would not. The hon. Gentleman can be perfectly sure that the consequences of Brexit feature high up on our future programme of work. Indeed, I am surprised only that he thinks we should have carried out the research into the consequences of Brexit before we even knew that it was going to take place.

# Backbench Business

## Online Abuse

11.45 am

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes the increasing number of cases where the internet, social media and mobile phone technology are used to bully, harass, intimidate and humiliate individuals including children and vulnerable adults; calls on the Government to ensure that clear legislation is in place that recognises the true impact and nature of online abuse, as distinct to offline abuse; and further calls on the Government to put in place appropriate legal and criminal sanctions, police training, guidance to the CPS and education for young people relating to such abuse.

Without digital connectivity and an online world, our lives would be poorer. The reason for this debate today is that our responsibility as elected representatives is clear: the internet needs to be a force for good, not for ill. I believe we all have a clear duty to come together and demand of the Government that they do more to address the problems of online abuse in all its forms. More than three quarters of our constituents use the internet almost every day, and more than half use their mobile phones to access it. Half of all crimes committed in this country have a digital component, and the police are overwhelmed by its scale and diversity, particularly the nature and impact of online abuse.

Rightly, the focus of the Government in the past has primarily been on online abuse that involves child abuse images, and I applaud the Prime Minister for his clear and personal resolve to outlaw that abhorrent crime. However, online abuse is much more than that, for both children and adults, and includes homophobic, transphobic, anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic hate crime, and image-based sexual abuse, to name but a few. Too often, those forms of online abuse and others continue to go unchallenged, because reporting mechanisms are unreliable or obscure, because the law was designed for an analogue age, and because the police are not properly trained to identify online abuse and then collect the evidence to make a case stick. We have to reject all forms of online abuse and show zero-tolerance through our legal systems, our police force and the things that we teach our children in schools.

It is for us to determine what sort of society we live in, not faceless corporate organisations, often many thousands of miles away. We cannot sit by and simply allow online abuse, in all its forms, to become an accepted norm in our society. With the blurring of the online and offline worlds, it is very easy to see how that might end. What is allowed to become an accepted form of online abuse could simply spill over into face-to-face life.

Like every other Member of this House, I believe in freedom of speech, but that freedom of speech has never been an unqualified right. Freedom of speech comes with responsibilities. At present, we are not ensuring that people who are expressing themselves online understand that fact.

The facts show the direction of travel. Today, one in four young people say they have been targeted with online hate because of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or transgender identity. Three quarters say that that has had a chilling effect on how

they then used the internet in the future for their free exchange of ideas. Teachers have reported a 40% increase in cybercrime in the past five years, with the perpetrators openly finding new ways to abuse their victims by skirting around the law. Parents have found it almost impossible to get rid of “baiting out” footage on YouTube, making the lives of many teenagers unbearable.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the right hon. Lady for bringing this vital issue to the House for consideration. There will not be one MP who has not had a constituent—especially young people—approach them about this very issue. I commend the right hon. Lady for making the point about young people being trolled in the digital world. It impacts not just upon that young person’s personality and how they respond, but in some cases in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom it has led to suicide. Is it not time for legislation that responds to this, so that we can put those trolls behind bars, where they should be?

**Mrs Miller:** I know from our conversations that the hon. Gentleman has a long-standing interest in the matter. He is right to say that the law is not protecting many young people who feel vulnerable, and that has led them, in some tragic cases, to take their own lives. We have to take this issue far more seriously and make sure that our laws are robust.

We have to deal with some very unpleasant truths, particularly the growth of peer-to-peer trading of sexual images. That is going unchecked in many cases, for fear of criminalising teenagers, but we know that about one in 10 of those cases could well involve an adult. That leaves young people at real risk of sexual exploitation, while the police find it difficult to know how to cope.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Does the right hon. Lady agree that one of the greatest concerns is the under-reporting by young people of these issues? Often, we and the police see only the tip of the iceberg. It is important that we look at the cultural issues.

**Mrs Miller:** That is a very good point about under-reporting. Even when those crimes are reported, the police might find it almost impossible to know how to tackle them. That might be because the law is inadequate, but it might also be because their training is inadequate.

I was recently given some evidence by “Good Morning Britain” of a freedom of information request that it made, which uncovered the fact that one in six crimes reported under revenge pornography laws involves children under the age of 18. That is not revenge pornography; that is child abuse. It is potentially misattributed in that way by the police. That leads, exactly as the hon. Lady said, to the under-reporting of one of the most appalling crimes in existence.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the work that the right hon. Lady has done on this subject. She and I are both involved in the Reclaim the Internet campaign to bring together the police, social media and organisations and individuals across the country to tackle online abuse. I agree that there are big questions for the law and for policing, particularly when it comes to protecting young people. Does she agree that much stronger responsibility is

[ Yvette Cooper ]

needed from everyone, including other organisations, individuals and social media platforms? Does she welcome the work that Stonewall and Facebook have been doing to tackle online bullying, LGBT discrimination and homophobia, and that they are launching a new online guide tomorrow?

**Mrs Miller:** I thank the right hon. Lady for highlighting the work that is going on. I pay tribute to Reclaim the Internet, the cross-party campaign that she started to make sure that we can come together and find a solution to one of the biggest that the country faces. Online abuse, as she rightly says, does not simply affect one group of people. It goes across society, and it is wrecking the lives of adults, too. The Government must be applauded for being one of the first in the world to recognise online image-based sexual abuse in their revenge pornography laws. The Leader of the House, when he was Lord Chancellor, was instrumental in putting those laws into place.

That action has been vindicated, because there have been more than 3,000 calls to the revenge pornography helpline since the laws were enacted—laws that I was told were not needed because there was adequate law in place already. There were 1,000 reported incidents in just six months last year. There is much more to do to make the laws effective and to enable the police to prosecute effectively, but I think it shows that the Government are open to persuasion on the matter, and I hope it demonstrates an open-mindedness for the future. Now is the time for a very clear strategy to tackle these problems. Every person in the country, regardless of their age, should have an expectation that that they will be able to use social media platforms and mobile technology without being subject to criminal abuse.

The online world is part of everybody's lives. The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), who is sitting on the Front Bench, has a deep interest in and knowledge of these issues. I know the personal work that he has done behind the scenes to try to press forward on many of these issues, and he should be commended for that. I know that the proposals in the Digital Economy Bill on stopping under-age access to pornography will have been subject to a great deal of attention from him. Those proposals are very welcome, but reinforce, I feel, the piecemeal approach to the problem. Experts have already made it clear that children will be, frankly, more than well equipped to get around most barriers put up to stop them getting access to pornography.

The approach in the Bill may well help in stopping younger children inadvertently coming across pornography—an issue I know the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has highlighted in recent research—but if the Government's policy is to be effective, it must be part of a much broader and clearer strategic plan, including mandatory sex and relationship education in all state-funded schools to give children the opportunity to understand how to make the right choices for them and put any pornography they may see into the proper perspective in their lives.

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** I join others in commending the right hon. Lady on securing this debate. She mentioned a multifaceted approach. When

I hear about cases in my constituency, one issue that concerns me is the irresponsibility—if we can call it that—of some parents, who give media and digital platform devices to their kids at a very young age and then leave them to it. Surely we need to do more to educate parents about their responsibilities and how they can teach their children to manage such devices responsibly.

**Mrs Miller:** The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We find it easy to talk about putting responsibilities on schools to teach, but he is right that it starts with all of us as parents. If we give our children these devices—including gaming devices, as there are clear problems there with regard to the grooming of children—we have to take responsibility for ensuring that they are knowledgeable about the risks and can start to make informed choices from what, as he says, can be a very early age. That can be easily reinforced at school. In the past I have been very open about the fact that I felt that sex and relationship education should be determined by schools, but as we move into the online world the very real dangers and problems encountered by children have changed my view on the need to make that education compulsory.

Some of the best and brightest people work on the online world. It is an incredibly creative industry, and the response to the problems of child abuse images shows that, if we are clear about our terms of engagement, when pressure is applied the industry can react quite swiftly. This debate enables Parliament to send a clear message to the industry, social media and the online world that enough is enough; our constituents deserve better and we will fight—as the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) says with her campaign—to reclaim the internet for them.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Backbench Business Committee for recognising the importance of this debate and allowing me and my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) to co-sponsor it. I also thank the myriad organisations that have worked with us to prepare for the debate: Durham University, Professor Sonia Livingstone of the London School of Economics, Stonewall, Galop, the NSPCC, Victim Support, the Internet Watch Foundation—the list goes on, because so many organisations have a deep concern about the direction of travel.

Social media platforms and internet providers are facilitators. Like many other organisations in our country, they provide a service, whereby they are able to gather our personal details to sell them for advertising opportunities. It can be quite astonishing to view a pair of shoes on one website and then see them pop up on another website two hours later in an entirely different context. I really take my hat off to the people who are able to do that. It is a sophisticated industry with sensitive and well developed ways of gathering information, selling sales opportunities and so making successful businesses. Today, I call for some of that incredible talent and expertise to be focused on stopping online abuse.

There are four issues that need to be addressed. First, we need to make sure that we have laws that are fit for purpose. I pay tribute to the work done by Durham

University, particularly by Professor Clare McGlynn, and Holly Dustin. We need to clarify what constitutes online abuse. We need better and clearer harassment laws that can be effectively applied online. We need an image-based sexual abuse law that clearly makes illegal all forms of image-based sexual abuse shared in a non-consensual manner. We need to end complete anonymity in the UK, and we need to insist that platforms have a legal duty to be able to identify the people who use their products in our country.

Secondly, we need to make it clear to those platforms and providers that they have to abide by a common standard for reporting mechanisms. They should provide accurate and transparent figures on the cases of reported abuse. When they are developing products, that needs to be done in a way that builds out abuse in the future, rather than building it in at the starting point.

Thirdly, we must be clear to online providers in our country that if they fail to take sensible measures to reduce online abuse, we as a Parliament will consider putting in place a levy to cover the costs of policing that are incurred purely as a result of online abuse crimes. That has been done in other areas—for example, the payments that are made by football teams for the policing of football stadiums. This is not a new idea, but it might concentrate minds when it comes to online abuse in the future.

Last but by no means least, we need to see a change in culture. Consent, respect and dignity should be at the heart of compulsorily delivered sex and relationship education in all our schools. Beyond that, campaigns should be run to make sure that people understand their own responsibilities to act sensibly and within the law while using the internet. That will be driven greatly by removing the veil of anonymity which currently cloaks so many inputs into social media.

Where there is a will, there is a way. I know that the Minister will want to show the House today that there is a clear will on the part of Government. More than four years ago the Prime Minister made it clear that there was no tolerance for child abuse online. At that point the industry had said that it could do little about it. Now, there is a clear strategy and clear protocols, and images are removed swiftly. With a worrying increase in online hate crime, perhaps even spilling out into the offline world already, we need to act swiftly. We need to make sure that cyberbullying and the newly formed concept of online baiting are shown short shrift.

Now is the time to act, and I call on the Minister to show us that he has an understanding of the need for a clear strategy to tackle online abuse in its totality. In the Digital Economy Bill which he published this week, he has just the legislative vehicle he needs to make any changes that such a strategy might call for. My hon. Friend is a good man. He knows that the online world needs a clear message from this House. I hope he listens intently to the debate today and takes back to his Department and to the industry the message that now is the time for change.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. If everybody takes about eight minutes and no longer, I will not have to impose a time limit and everybody will get in.

12.3 pm

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for securing this debate, and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. She has done a great deal in her role as Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee, and before that on the problem of the online abuse that is increasingly experienced by women. I commend her particularly for her work on the revenge porn legislation.

We know that online abuse takes various forms—cruel comments and messages, the sharing of photos without consent, being sent unwanted images, or threats of sexual or physical violence. Although there is a range of forms of online abuse, one thing is clear: online abuse is happening consistently across all social media platforms, and more needs to be done to stop it.

I am very pleased to be supporting, along with other Members, the Reclaim the Internet campaign of my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). It demands change so that voices are not silenced by misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia or any other form of intimidation online. I understand that the campaign was launched last year, but it will have its first big event on Monday 18 July, bringing together anti-bullying campaigners, groups that focus on online protection and members of the industry to see what steps can be taken to stop abusive behaviour. I hope that all Members get behind this campaign.

Online abuse affects many people and groups in society, but it seems that women are subject to particular vitriol online, and I want to focus my comments on women. Online abuse of women contains frequent use of threats of sexual violence and derogatory comments about women's appearance and bodies. Women are the major victims of revenge porn, where explicit photos or videos are shared without consent, and those individuals who perpetrate online abuse seem to take even greater pleasure in shouting down women who speak out against it. We must address this.

I am sure that many of my fellow female Members from across the House are, unfortunately, all too familiar with this kind of online abuse. The anonymity and distance that people think social media gives them enables them to say things online that I hope they would never say face to face, but this online abuse must be tackled so that it does not prevent women from wanting to get involved in public life.

When it comes to young people and online abuse, it is young women who are disproportionately affected. A study by the Pew Research Centre in the United States found that 25% of women aged 18 to 24 had been targeted with online sexual harassment and 26% of women had been stalked online—that is one in four women. It is appalling. It needs to be made clear that this kind of behaviour is as unacceptable online as it is offline. The study also found that men are more likely than women to report online abuse, so there is some disconnect, whereby women do not feel able to report the abuse, or maybe feel that it is not even a reportable crime. We must address the issue of enabling women to take their complaints to the police.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The hon. Lady is right to identify the need to get more women to come forward and actively complain. Does

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

she agree that one thing that could make a real difference is giving anonymity to the victims of revenge porn? That would bring more people forward to make complaints, which could lead to prosecutions.

**Dr Blackman-Woods:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a very interesting point, and we in this House need to look at it in more detail.

This issue affects younger women, and particularly young women who are still at school. One way in which online abuse was first brought to my attention was by head teachers in my constituency who came to see me to tell me how much of a problem online abuse is in school. They asked me to raise the issue in Parliament to see what could be done to help head teachers and others in schools to tackle it.

I am also a member of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, a branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and we have looked in great detail at the issue of violence against women, in particular the rise of online abuse as a form of violence against women. This is becoming such a significant element of the experience of women in public life that we made it one of the key themes of our international conference in 2015. We heard from groups, such as Internet Watch Foundation, that outlined the difficulty of tackling the prolific online abuse of women, along with legal professionals who pointed out that the current legislation is simply not where it needs to be to address this issue. The conference identified online abuse as a global phenomenon, and we now want to work with partners in other countries to get the best legislation possible. That work is ongoing.

I wish to praise my own constabulary in Durham and our Chief Constable Mike Barton, who has been at the forefront of speaking out on this issue from the policing perspective and has highlighted how long the police spend dealing with online incidents. He has talked about the need to clarify legislation to make it much easier for the police to deal with complaints about online abuse and to know how to tackle the problem and when to categorise incidents as criminal. We have to make sure that our police are equipped to deal with the ever-changing nature of crime and the new world of online harassment. In particular, we need to make sure that they have the necessary resources and training. At the moment, only about 7,500 out of 100,000 police officers in England and Wales have been trained.

I welcome the Government's moves in this area, and I know that the Minister will be listening today, but we need to make sure that our laws reflect our increasingly technological society. I again pay tribute to the work being done at Durham University to outline to legislators how we need to consolidate and update existing legislation and then adopt a clear strategy on how it is implemented and enforced. Only when we do that will we—I hope—get the culture change that the right hon. Member for Basingstoke stressed and that we need if we are to stop all forms of online abuse.

12.11 pm

**Simon Hart** (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I thank the Backbench Business Committee and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for giving us the opportunity to talk about this issue.

Like many others, I suspect, I came to it as a result of a few incidents being reported in my constituency. I thought I was on the brink of uncovering a fairly limited, isolated and occasional problem, but on looking more deeply into the subject, I quickly discovered that it was a huge issue affecting vast numbers of people, young and old, and not just in my own patch of west Wales but across the UK.

The extent of the problem is well illustrated by information from Victim Support, which has worked with more than 12,000 children in schools over the last three years. It tells us that 56% of those kids were identified as victims of online crime—a staggering and worrying statistic; that 41% reported persistent and targeted bullying online from their peers; and that a third reported being sent non-requested online pornography. That is probably a significant underestimation of the problem, because, as we know, many people might be fearful of reporting abuse or might not know how or where to go to make a complaint.

I do not want to repeat my right hon. Friend's contribution word for word, but this problem does not just impact on young people and their families. We are talking about racism, gender issues, homophobia, anti-Semitic abuse, disability issues and prejudice and intimidation, including in respect of religion, shape, style, sexual orientation and, in some cases, people's everyday beliefs. YouGov recently surveyed just over 2,000 adults: 81% reported bullying as commonplace in school; 56% reported it as commonplace at work; and 64% believed it was widespread throughout society. I wonder what the contrast would have been had YouGov undertaken that survey five or 10 years ago.

Online abuse knows no boundaries: it affects the old, the young, the vulnerable, and it can, these days, be worryingly anonymous. It was described to me the other day as being like a persistent headache from which one simply cannot escape—there is no safe place or private little haven where one can escape the impact of the online bully. It can lead to reputational damage, financial loss, job loss, mental health issues, relationship breakdown, isolation and even, in the worst cases, suicide.

As we have discovered, part of the problem is that no one knows exactly how big the issue is. This is what we are trying to understand. With over 30 pieces of legislation covering a variety of crimes, it is difficult to get a clear picture. The closest we got were statistics, courtesy of the Library, on the number of prosecutions under section 127 of the Communications Act 2003. In 2004, 143 people were cautioned, proceeded against and found guilty under this section. In 2014, that had risen to 1,209, and that represented an 18% increase on 2013. One figure on which we can rely, therefore, is the dramatic increase in the number of prosecutions under that one single piece—out of 30 pieces—of legislation.

There is a concern about consistent terminology. We seem unable to define clearly exactly what online abuse is. We all have our own private views, but there seems to be some misunderstanding within the law over exactly what “online abuse” means. Without that definition, there can be inconsistencies in the application of the law and in the assistance people get from those charged with protecting us from online abuse. We welcome the Crown Prosecution Service interim revised guidelines, but, as I will come to, there remains a question about whether they go far enough.

I am a little concerned that the Government earlier this year said that they

“did not intend to introduce specific additional legislation to address online harassment and internet trolling”.

The reason they gave was that they did not want young people to be unnecessarily criminalised. That is an entirely justifiable position, but it demonstrates a narrow awareness of the true scale of the problem and does not take into account the many other target groups of people who find themselves victims of this problem. Previously in the House, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), referring to the 30 laws, went so far as to say:

“It is imperative that these laws are rigorously enforced.”—[*Official Report*, 29 June 2016; Vol. 612, c. 327.]

We will have to address that issue with those charged with enforcement.

How does this harassment take place? As we have heard, it is abusive messages online, texts and emails, social media, digital photos used to embarrass the victim, account hacking, sexual grooming, extortion, blackmail and anything else these people can think of. The national stalking helpline, which has been referred to already, has statistics showing that most abusive behaviour is now digital rather than offline. As we become more dependent on online activity, so children and adults find themselves in a world in which there is no escape from this kind of activity.

I have some questions. Do we know the scale of the problem? It seems not. How many people are too afraid to report it? We do not know, except we know there are thousands. How many people do not know how to report it or who to report it to? We do not know that either, other than that it is probably plenty. Are schools equipped to spot the signs, and should the responsibility lie exclusively with schools? I do not think we know that either. Are the police trained? Do they have the resources? Are they serious about dealing with reports? We do not know. Are existing laws satisfactorily enforced? It appears from the Minister that there are further enforcement issues to address.

Do the social media platforms take their responsibilities seriously enough? As mentioned earlier, organisations such as Facebook and Twitter have done a great deal to improve the situation and take the problem seriously, but back when most communication was through printed newspapers—some of us will remember those days—if anyone had written a letter to an editor in the old days when that was possible, containing some of the stuff it now appears perfectly reasonable to put on Facebook or Twitter, there would have been no question of it seeing the light of day; it would have been torn up and chucked in the bin. Now, however, some of those platforms are facilitating some pretty disgusting material, and sort of saying, “Well, it’s up to the victim to complain to the police if they wish.” I am not sure that social media platforms, good work though they have done, are yet in a position that can be called fully responsible.

It is good that the CPS has acknowledged concerns, but bad that the Government do not feel obliged to do anything further at this stage. It is good that such a wide collection of charities, organisations and groups have helped us and are bringing the issue to public attention, and that His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge is behind the taskforce on the prevention of cyberbullying. As he put it, we need to stand up to bullies, not stand by.

I am worried that we live in a world where the kind of language, tone, and incidents we read about are becoming so widespread and common that they are almost becoming normal. If they become normal, what hope can we have for children and vulnerable adults who live in that kind of cyber-world? For that reason, I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke thought it appropriate to bring the issue to the attention of the House today.

12.21 pm

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on securing this important debate.

This is a serious and growing problem for all in modern society, and it spans all age groups and demographics. Research commissioned by Demos found that in three weeks, 10,000 tweets were sent from UK accounts that aggressively attacked someone for being a “slut” or a “whore”. Revenge Porn Helpline received 4,000 calls in the last year, with cases affecting children as young as 11 years old being reported. According to the NASUWT, the largest teaching union in the UK, more than half of teachers also report receiving online abuse.

In February this year, the UK Safer Internet Centre published a study that found that of the 13 to 18-year-olds surveyed, 24% had been targeted owing to their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, or transgender identity. One in 25 said that they were singled out for abuse all or most of the time. Although such abuse has spanned all of society, teenagers with disabilities, and those from African, Caribbean, Asian, middle eastern and other minority ethnic groups were more likely to encounter cyber-bullying. Parliament and Governments across the UK have a responsibility to face up to that issue and take appropriate action to prevent and address it.

In Scotland, our First Minister has been vocal in condemning this issue, and the Scottish Government have provided full funding for Respectme, Scotland’s anti-bullying service, which is managed by the Scottish Association for Mental Health. That vital service works with adults who are involved in the lives of children and young people, to give them the practical skills and confidence to deal with children who are bullied and those who bully others. It is important that those of us in public life provide leadership on this issue, and Members will agree that no one should have to accept online abuse, and that those who have been subject to it should report it to the police. They must not suffer in silence or alone.

I want to use my personal experience of this issue to encourage the public to stand up to online abuse, and I ask those in public life to show stronger leadership in the conduct of our public debates. When I decided to stand for Parliament, I did so because I wanted to make a positive difference to the lives of people in my constituency and across the country. I did so in full knowledge that by standing up for what I believe, I would hold myself open to challenge from those who do not share my political beliefs. A robust, honest, political debate about our views and deeds is a vital part of any democracy, and we should embrace it. As we saw from the report published by Sir John Chilcot yesterday, an absence of

[Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh]

critical debate in Parliament, Government, and our democratic system can have disastrous consequences. I therefore came here with the full knowledge and expectation that my words and actions would be held up to public scrutiny, and that is right.

What has sometimes taken my breath away, shocked my family, and reduced me to tears, is the vitriolic, hateful, and sometimes criminal levels of personal abuse that I and colleagues across the House have faced. I have received hateful handwritten letters that contained sexual slurs, phone calls to my office threatening violence towards me or my staff, and racist emails stating what people want to do to people like me who are Muslim. Although such communications are all too common, they are not an everyday experience, and I am grateful—as we should all be—to the police at Westminster, in Scotland, and across the UK, for their work to help and support those who fall victim to these crimes, and to investigate the perpetrators. The police provide a sympathetic level of support to victims, no matter what their background or circumstances, and it is important to encourage people to report such abuse at every stage.

I know that I am not alone in my determination to make myself open and available to those to whom I am accountable, and in the 21st century that means being active on social media. I agree with Scotland's First Minister, who recently said that thanks to the positive power of Twitter and Facebook we can now communicate directly with our constituents about the work we are doing on their behalf, and hear their views without a filter or barrier between us. However, the great tragedy of that new technology has been the advancement in online bullying, abuse and threats, and that horrific experience is not confined to those of us who sit in this Chamber. Let me say directly to all those watching from outside Parliament who have been victims of online abuse, that all of us here today are standing right beside you. We know how it feels because we understand the pain you have been through, and we will do our best to address this horrendous issue.

In the past 14 months, I have been called a Nazi, received messages that called for me to be shot as a traitor, and read in tears as strangers attacked my father who passed away two years ago. Recently I spoke to the *Sunday Mail* newspaper, and I am grateful for the article it published, which included some of the dreadful things that have been said to me, none of which are worthy of being repeated because of the status and stature of this Chamber. However, my husband sees those messages, my children read this garbage, and my staff are required to wade through this sickening filth each day to get to the important information they need to do their jobs.

**Mrs Helen Grant** (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful point. Does she agree that all victims, including politicians, should be given all the help and support that they need and deserve to move on with their life and careers, and to bring the perpetrators to justice?

**Ms Ahmed-Sheikh:** I agree entirely with the hon. Lady, and this abuse is difficult for anyone who faces it. There is an anticipation and expectation that we must

be strong, but perhaps we are not and some people have more strength than others. Support mechanisms must exist, and we must help people to move on. No matter who is the victim, such abuse is disgusting and vile, which is why I support the honourable aims and objectives of the Reclaim the Internet campaign. I congratulate all those who have been involved in setting that up across the Chamber and beyond on seizing the initiative.

We must examine the role of the police and prosecutors, and be clear about when threats and harassment become crimes. Social media and publishing platforms must accept this serious issue, and take steps to address it. We are entitled to expect more from Facebook and Twitter in their handling of these issues. We must consider how best to provide support for victims and how to take on the trolls, and we must empower and educate our young people about these issues and how to address them.

Individual Members of Parliament are not responsible for the specific content of tweets or Facebook posts by others, but we are responsible for setting the tone of the national debate. I believe we are at a vital point in our politics. We have recently made, and will continue to make, significant and defining decisions about the type of country and society we want to be. We can embrace the politics of hope, or the politics of hate, and it is our role as elected representatives to show leadership and conduct ourselves in a way that defines the political debate. To those who may be watching this debate and dealing out abuse on the internet, perhaps even as we speak, I say this: you are the cowards, but we will stand up for the brave.

12.29 pm

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): Tragically, online abuse has become part of all our lives. I have been subject to it, although I am not a member of a minority religion or race. Like many hon. Members I have received online abuse. Nothing has really hurt or affected me terribly, but on one occasion I simply posted some comments about boy racers who were causing antisocial behaviour. Within about an hour I was being abused from all round the globe, by boy racers who had obviously noticed a deficit in my sex life, and who were offering a wide range of suggestions to improve it, some of which would have ended in certain death. I had to take the post down—not because I was personally offended or concerned, but because I simply could not monitor it to ensure that that level of foul and abusive language was not left on my Facebook page for people to see. It is becoming clear to me from my mailbox how much online and internet abuse is affecting my residents—it is growing all the time, and includes women and children who face stalking online from ex-partners.

I have noticed within the past two years an enormous improvement in the police response. Whereas two years ago I found that the police suggested to women that they should simply come off Facebook or stop being online, they now more often have a more appropriate response—they now recognise that, in the modern age, people should be as safe online as they are when they walk down the street—but we have some way to go. I am pleased that, today, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has recognised Essex police and the work of my excellent chief constable, and rated them as effective and reliable in their treatment of vulnerable victims.

It is incredibly important that we get the legislation right—the Minister is listening. Chief Constable Stephen Kavanagh of Essex police has said, as has been pointed out, that the police deal with 30 different pieces of legislation that simply do not work for victims. The legislation is either out of date or does not go far enough and the police need to be properly prepared and trained to deal with the magnitude of cases of online abuse. Our role must be to future-proof the recently announced Digital Economy Bill, so that we are not permanently playing catch-up. The digital economy is growing more sophisticated all the time, and its pace of change outstrips that of all kinds of other technologies.

On a wider point about our culture, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), we see the vile comments underneath stories in local or even national newspapers, and foul comments on Twitter, and in the past week, post-Brexit, we have seen an appalling upsurge in racial comments, all of which are vile and rightly should be prosecuted. Another shocking thing in the wake of Brexit is that nice, normally liberal-minded people—people who would profess to be progressives—also think it is reasonable to abuse 17 million of their fellow countrymen, including 73% of my constituents, as being clearly stupid or racist. It is no less illiberal or intolerant to think that all people of a certain race are of one set of opinions or one viewpoint. In our culture, people—seriously liberal, intelligent and educated people—think they can say those things online. They turn into keyboard warriors and say things that they would never dream of saying face to face to an individual.

We have a responsibility to deal with that abuse in our culture. If that is acceptable and if it is seen day by day, no wonder women do not come forward and they take attacks for granted; no wonder children think it is all right to be abused and attacked online; and no wonder the perpetrators and genuine criminals feel emboldened and that their behaviour is normal. I would say to everyone who goes online that they should post nothing that they would not write if they are not prepared to give their full name and address. It is a cultural issue, and legislation alone will never tackle it unless we take personal responsibility for changing our culture in this country.

12.33 pm

**Gill Furniss** (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): It is a cliché to say that the internet has changed the world we live in, but it is a cliché because it is true. It is not possible to list the changes the internet has brought about because, over the past quarter of a century, it has simply become all pervasive. It has now reached the stage where, with smartphones, we carry it around in our pockets.

I know I am labouring a very obvious truth, but it is important in the debate to take a moment to reflect on just how central the internet has become to our daily lives. For my generation, the internet is a technical marvel, but for young people growing up today, the internet and the things that happen online are just another normal, everyday part of their world. That is why it is so important to have this debate. We cannot stand by and watch the sort of abuse and harassment that a small minority of internet users inflict on the rest of us become normalised. It is not too much of a wild

prediction to say that the internet, social media and smartphones are here to stay, so it is vital that we do all we can to combat and prevent the abhorrent misuse of what are, when all is said and done, powerful tools for communicating thoughts and ideas.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend believe the Government should consider the additional costs incurred as a result of the bullying, trolling and abuse that people experience online? A few years ago in my area, there was a 25% increase in referrals to child and adolescent mental health services, so abuse clearly has a bigger societal impact, and a financial one.

**Gill Furniss:** I agree with my hon. Friend that that must be considered.

The sheer scale of the problem is daunting. As public figures, I am sure that many if not all hon. Members have been on the receiving end. To give just a few statistics, a Greater London Authority report suggests that only 9% of online hate crimes were investigated nationwide. Back in 2014, the charity Beat Bullying reported that a third of young people have experienced bullying online, including one in five eight to eleven-year-olds, while one in 13 was subjected to relentless abuse over a period of weeks, months or even years. Last year, the Revenge Porn Helpline received nearly 4,000 calls.

Similarly, the nature of the problem means there are no quick fixes. The anonymity that the internet allows means that users can choose to ignore the normal social conventions on what it is acceptable and not acceptable to say to someone, safe behind the mask of a fake username. Facebook did not create misogyny, nor did Twitter invent racism. People who use those and other online platforms to vent their hatred and abuse hold those views in the real world, and are simply taking advantage of the anonymity of cyberspace.

As much as we might like to pass a law that does away with intolerance, we cannot, but that is not to say that we are helpless, either as a Parliament or as a society. We might be unable to flick a legislative switch, but there are steps we can take to start tackling the problem of online abuse, including in respect of online platforms, for instance. Over the past few years, Facebook, Twitter and Google have begun engaging with their users and made it easier to report and counter online abuse. They are to be commended for that, but there are serious concerns that none of those companies is fully transparent about the measures it is taking internally to get to grips with the problem of people using its site for abuse. Twitter, for instance, claims that it employs more than 100 staff to deal with reported abuse, who presumably cover the entire network of 320 million users. Likewise, Facebook says it has several hundred people monitoring reported abuse. That sounds impressive, but we should remember that the site has 1.6 billion users.

Too often, users are unclear on how to report abuse, and how it will be dealt with when they do. As a starting point, we need greater transparency from such platforms on how they enforce their terms of use. I urge the Government to work constructively with them to encourage them to be more open about the scale of the problem and their responses.

[Gill Furniss]

On what we can do as lawmakers, there are practical responses that Ministers should consider. First and foremost, we need legislation that clearly defines online abuse—that is called for in the motion—and that consolidates our existing laws. According to Digital-Trust, more than 30 pieces of legislation are currently used to tackle online crimes including, of all things, the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. As much as we thank Viscount Palmerston, it is time we ended our piecemeal approach and provided the public with confidence and the police with the clarity they need to bring to book those who commit offences online.

The fragmented nature of the law means that the criminal justice system is often unsure whether an offence has been committed, and is thus not able to provide victims with the service and protection they expect and deserve. A consolidation of the legislation can be of value only if it includes a clear and consistent definition of exactly what constitutes online abuse. Our current mish-mash approach means that many malicious and abusive communications, which any reasonable person would judge to be unacceptable, often do not reach the legal threshold and so complaints against them cannot be progressed. A clearer definition would go a long way to eliminating this problem, and would build public trust that those in breach of the law can be held accountable.

It is obvious that the police are under incredible pressure trying to deal with even the small proportion of online abuse reported to them. It is estimated that half of all crimes reported to the police have some digital element, and they expect this to rise to 70% in the next five years. However, just 7.5% of officers in England and Wales are trained to investigate digital crime. The scale of the problem is such that all police officers need to be in a position to tackle online abuse: to know how to investigate it and secure evidence. A consolidation of legislation must be backed up by a corresponding overhaul of enforcement if we are to make any headway, and that means not only a review of the training given to officers but a serious rethink about approaches to police recruitment. I appreciate the strain on police budgets, but unless we dramatically expand our police's ability to clamp down on online crime, we will be stuck trying to apply 20th-century methods to 21st-century problems.

It is encouraging that online safety is now part of the national curriculum. We cannot underestimate the importance of education in dealing with online abuse. As much as we expect our children to learn the difference between right and wrong in the real world, and expect them to get along with one another at school, so we must press home, and press home early, that the same standards should apply online. Clearly, there is no magic bullet for dealing with online abuse, but that does not mean the Government should shy away from confronting it. It will take a broad strategy, worked out across Departments and implemented with service providers, charities and many others. Such plans are not cobbled together overnight, but I press the Minister to take today's debate as a starting point. If we have shown anything, it is that there is a strong desire for action across the House and beyond. I sincerely hope the Government will be bold in their response to a problem that we simply cannot allow to fester.

12.42 pm

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing this important debate.

This is an issue of utmost importance to me, made all the more personal after a high profile case of revenge porn, which grabbed national headlines, involving a perpetrator and victims from my home town and constituency back in April. In the wake of that case, lessons have been learned locally. I am very pleased to say that the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable are reviewing awareness training for those on the frontline to improve the experience of victims, secure greater justice for them, and to better reflect how serious and how damaging online abuse is. We need that change in culture so that online abuse is recognised as real world, causing as it does emotional, psychological and physical damage. A freedom of information inquiry by the BBC found that in over 1,000 cases, 11% of offenders were charged and 7% received a caution.

I would like to share a victim's plea to us. Her perpetrator was one of the 7%.

"This is an open letter to those who have the power to lobby for change. This is my story.

The perpetrator was my manager. We stayed in contact long after I left my job, remaining friendly acquaintances via social media. It wasn't until April this year that I discovered a message on my social media alerting me to a website that contained my images. This website allowed individuals from all over the world to upload and view pictures of unsuspecting victims, many of them children, and using those images as fodder for torture fantasies. My page, which had been created in October 2015, revealed my full name, my personal Facebook account, a picture of my toddler daughter. Alongside these images, there were captions and incitements such as 'would love to beat her', 'she deserves to be gang raped', and urging people to find me, make contact and show me what I 'deserve'.

I felt demeaned, exposed, utterly humiliated and embarrassed. Someone out there held all the power. I wasn't even in control of my own image any more. I needed to take back control, so I put on my investigator hat and after many, many hours of trawling I thought I had found the perpetrator. Initially, I felt relief and I contacted the police the next morning believing I had caught a criminal red-handed. The police operator told me that there was 'nothing they could do' as it was not a police matter, it was a Facebook issue. I was advised just to block him, as he obviously wasn't my friend. I hung up the phone feeling bitterly let down and confused. I was told I wouldn't be getting a crime number, as my case 'isn't a real crime' and more of a civil matter, and perhaps I should seek legal advice. That legal advice told me that the definitions of the new law regarding revenge porn and its phrasing meant that my case wouldn't be suitable.

Since I have chosen to bring this subject to the public's attention, I have had mixed reactions to the whole episode. I have had random strangers come up to me in the street and start talking to me about it, which I do still find embarrassing. I have had people talk to me about it at parties, where I should be enjoying myself. I have had customers ask me where they recognise me from, then give me a sympathetic, pitying look when I confirm from where. Overall, I have been treated like a victim by everyone apart from the law.

Perpetrators surely need to fear that their online actions will have real consequences. My photos are still online. I am sick of being a victim. What I ask is that, with your help, never again will I and others be made to feel insignificant when reporting an online abuse crime."

12.47 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing the debate. We have already heard many striking and distressing personal accounts today and I am honoured to follow the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell).

As we have heard, there has been a frightening increase in online abuse, digital crime and hate crime. Many Members have been affected, as have numberless people outside this House. Children, too, have been affected. The national police lead said last November that 50% of all reported crime now has an online component. It is evident that the law has not kept up with criminal activity. Online platform providers are, at best, slow to address abuse. They should be far more effective and rigorous in holding both abusers and themselves to account.

For all those reasons, in March this year I introduced a ten-minute rule Bill on this very issue, drafted by Harry Fletcher of the Digital-Trust. There are over 30 statutes passed over many decades that cover online abuse crime. My Bill would place responsibility on the Government to consolidate them all. Many online activities may or may not be against the law—the Bill would clarify that. For example, it would be an offence to install a webcam on a person without their permission or without legitimate reason. In addition, it would be illegal to repeatedly locate, listen to or watch a person without legitimate purpose. The Bill would restrict the sale of spyware to persons over 16 only. It would also be wrong for a person to take multiple images of a person, unless it was in the public interest to do so, without that person's permission and where the intent was not legitimate—we have heard about a number of such cases today. The Bill would make the law stronger on abusive content. Again, police officers are uncertain about what is and is not a crime, and they are overwhelmed by the sheer volume of abuse they see. We have also heard about inconsistencies of approach by the police. The Bill would make it clear that it is an offence to post images online where the intention is to humiliate or abuse the victim. It would also create an offence to post any message that is discriminatory or would incite abusive activity. All those new offences would, if put into action, carry on conviction a sentence of up to 12 months' custody.

Any new powers for the police or the Crown Prosecution Service would, of course, have limited impact without changes to culture and training. The police must take online abuse and hate crime seriously. The Bill would therefore place a responsibility on the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that all establishments include sessions that warn children and students of the risks of online services. We know that this is happening in our schools and that it is an ongoing issue. Tokenistic approaches to the curriculum will not be sufficient. The Home Office would be tasked with ensuring that the police are trained and that they record complaints of digital hate crimes and abuse.

Finally, the Bill would place duties on providers of online services to adhere to codes of professional standards, to publish safety impact assessments and to co-operate fully with the police in any ongoing investigation. The relevant Ministers should ensure that the best quality standards are followed across the industry.

I am sure that we all have a number of case studies that we could discuss. Someone who contacted me wishes to remain anonymous, so I shall respect that, but I very much wanted to raise his case because it involves Facebook. The gentleman in question is a teacher. Before I was fortunate enough to arrive in this place about a year ago, I was also a teacher. I was very much aware of how vulnerable teachers are to comments from pupils and others and also, given the importance of child protection, how that vulnerability can be used against teachers and how little protection they have.

This gentleman contacted me earlier this week to express his frustration at Facebook. Despite having no Facebook account himself, pupils had stolen images from his websites and used them to create a false Facebook page in his name. This page then attracted other pupils at the school. At one stage, the headteacher, who not unusually had little understanding or experience of Facebook, suspected the teacher of deliberately attracting pupils. If the pupils had not finally admitted to creating the false page, the teacher could easily have lost his job. He was effectively unable to prove that he was not responsible for the page.

In this instance, the victim stated that the police could only advise him to contact Facebook, but in his experience Facebook was unhelpful—here I am summarising the magnitude of the problems he had with it. First, the teacher had to get the password details from the pupils before the page could be taken down. Secondly and importantly, in raising questions about data protection, it became apparent that the teacher had to apply to the Data Protection Commissioner of Ireland, because that is where Facebook's international office is based. All law, except that of the United States and Canada, has to be handled through that data protection commissioner. It seems that Facebook has broad expectations of users' behaviour, but is unwilling to take much responsibility, if any, as a platform for that behaviour. There is a worrying lack of procedures to take down false sites, with the onus entirely on the victims to prove their identity. Facebook and other sites need to be held to account for the nature of the services they provide to users, and for whether those services incorporate proper care for both customers and the public at large.

It is not good enough for Twitter to tell me how to hide myself away and block messages from certain people—I had one of these messages when I last looked at Twitter about 20 minutes ago. I want those people and Twitter held to account if there are unacceptable messages on my Twitter account. Finally, I believe that the nature of how social media providers fulfil their duty of care to private individuals requires far fuller parliamentary scrutiny, and I await the Minister's response.

12.53 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I add my thanks to the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing it. I am sure that many Members of all parties will, like me, have met in their surgeries the victims of online abuse—or, more often than not, their parents, who come to us seeking some form of redress or often just

[*Caroline Nokes*]

some ongoing safety for their children. It is interesting to note that organisations such as the Girl Guides with their annual girls' attitude survey have ascertained that cyberbullying is in the top three concerns of girls between the ages of 15 and 20. It is growing in its significance and impact on its victims.

Abuse is abuse, wherever and however it happens. Just because it is online does not make it any less awful, but it does make it significantly harder to identify perpetrators and bring them to justice. It is simply not good enough to shrug one's shoulders and dismiss the internet as some sort of wild west—ungovernable and devoid of social norms and the laws of the physical world. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke said, we must bring an end to anonymity.

We must remember that many of the victims are children. I vividly recall my daughter's transition from primary to secondary school, now some years ago, when her headteacher got parents together to talk about the perils of Facebook. At that time, social media was growing in popularity, but was still relatively small. There was not the multitude of platforms that there are today. The phrase the headteacher used will always stick with me—that, frankly, in her view children were losing the ability to empathise. They were making their unpleasant comments online from their smartphone, and unlike in the playground, they could not see the reaction in someone's eyes. People are not learning about the hurt caused, but simply banging out a message that can have a terrible impact. The ability to understand and comprehend the hurt that has been caused is disappearing.

It is not just children who are losing the ability to empathise. People often say the most dreadful things online, which they would never repeat in person or even on the telephone. If I receive an abusive email, I sometimes find that the best tactic is to phone up the person. Suddenly, they turn into the most polite and delightful constituent that I could ever encounter.

**Rebecca Harris:** Does my hon. Friend agree that we could take that slightly further? I have knocked on the doors of people who have been particularly abusive, and they crumble.

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend is slightly braver than I am. She earlier used the phrase “keyboard warriors” who we find are incredibly brave in the sanctuary of their own homes, but much more timid in the real world. When online trolls are arrested and we see their pictures in the newspapers, I always think how terribly inadequate they look. The monsters they have made of themselves in people's minds are often not borne out in real life. They simply do not understand the terror that they can cause.

I have had my own experience and vividly remember a Facebook message from someone purporting to be a woman, hiding behind the photograph of a dead lady whose death had been covered in the newspaper. I was sent the most terrible message, threatening me with rape, torture and, ultimately, death. The greatest lesson I learned from that is that it can take many months to wheedle identities out of Facebook. Facebook appears to have become the bogeyman of this debate, but I

think deservedly so. When we find the actual identities, it brings a sense of relief, because they are an identifiable person, albeit not necessarily someone who lives anywhere nearby. Such messages can still be absolutely terrifying however.

**Simon Hart:** Newspapers are not allowed to print libels or defamatory or slanderous comments that somebody else makes. Why can that not apply to social media platforms too?

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that it should apply to social media platforms, and we as individuals should be able to take action against them much more quickly and effectively. As I said, it is as if the internet has become a wild west. Companies are often registered in the Republic of Ireland and it is difficult from here to get the redress that we want.

Sadly, in this place, we have come to expect the trolling, the bile often spat in the dead of night, sometimes even from professional people, who we might have hoped would value their own reputations and know better. We know that the bar is set higher for Members of Parliament: we are in the public eye and we have to expect a bit of knockabout, as it were. Actually, though, it has gone a great deal further than that.

I pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) to reclaim the internet. If someone sends me something pernicious, one of my favourite tactics, inspired by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who is not in her place today, is to reply with a picture of a kitten. I presume I will now get trolled for that. We have to reclaim the internet; we have to be bold enough to stand up for ourselves and try to engender a bit of humour and kindness. That is a key point: there is no kindness on the internet, but when did it become okay to play the man and not the ball?

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke advanced some very cogent and sensible arguments. I know that Ministers have worked hard with some of the leading companies in trying to find practical solutions to the problems of reporting and identifying perpetrators. As we have heard, there are laws relating to harassment and grooming, but there are real anxieties about how victims can report crimes easily and ensure that their voices are heard.

**Mrs Miller:** Does my hon. Friend think that we should look to countries such as Australia and New Zealand, which have established websites to facilitate reporting? Indeed, there is a risk that their ways of tackling the problem are leaving the United Kingdom behind.

**Caroline Nokes:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must not be left behind; we must find better methods of reporting, particularly where children are concerned. Let me reinforce my right hon. Friend's earlier plea. There need to be safe spaces for children, and mechanisms that enable young people to know who they can turn to. A critical part of that can take place in schools, through personal, social, health and economic education and, in particular, sexual relationships education.

Young people need to learn about consent. They need to learn what is okay in a relationship and what is not, and they also need to be able to turn to responsible adults who can ensure that they are adequately safeguarded

and protected. We want them to be confident in themselves, and to know who they can turn to in a crisis. That is one of the reasons why I am so keen on compulsory PSHE and SRE. We need young people to be able to recognise what constitutes an abusive relationship, we need people whom they know they can tell, and we need teachers who are equipped to deal with these subjects. We know that they are not easy subjects to teach, so they should be made statutory, and teachers should be trained so that they themselves will be confident in their ability to deliver excellent quality in this respect.

My right hon. Friend described the blurring of offline and online worlds. We desperately need to plot a path towards ensuring that our children are much more secure and protected.

1.1 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I, too, thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for initiating the debate. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee. I think it very important for us to raise these issues. I have been shocked by some of the examples that have been given today, but I am afraid I am going to add to them.

Online abuse is not a technological problem; it is a social problem that just happens to be powered by technology. I will not deny that social media can be a force for good, disseminating information and allowing people to share jokes or simply keep in contact with friends and relatives. As has already been pointed out, we, as MPs, are encouraged to be as accessible as possible—to be out there with websites and our Facebook and Twitter pages, staying connected to our constituents and keeping them as well informed as possible—but more and more, especially in the case of female MPs, our “out-thereness” makes us a target for online abuse. Indeed, most prominent women in any field will have stories of vile comments posted to or about them, usually by anonymous sources. When it is allowed to rampage unchecked and unmoderated, social media becomes much more accurately titled “unsocial media”.

There is, of course, the “free speech” argument, which unfortunately appears to many people to be the divine right to say whatever is on one’s mind without any regard for the consequences. With free speech, however, comes the responsibility to deal with the consequences of one’s words. What concerns me, particularly in the case of Twitter and Facebook, is the apparent lack of a coherent policy on what constitutes “online abuse”. Let me give a few examples.

Twitter policy states:

“We do not tolerate behaviour that crosses the line into abuse, including behaviour that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user’s voice.”

With that in mind, when I received a threat on Twitter during the referendum debate—

“We’ll see what you say when an immigrant rapes you or one of your kids”—

I reported it to Twitter, using its online pro forma. Surely this racist, violent and targeted abuse crossed the line into behaviour that harasses and intimidates, which Twitter policy claims to be against. But no; the response that I received from Twitter was

“it’s not currently violating the Twitter rules”.

The killers of Lee Rigby, who was from Middleton in my constituency, posted explicitly on Facebook what they were planning, yet that was never picked up and investigated. I recently reported a vile and misogynistic comment made about another female MP on Facebook. It read—and I quote selectively—

“She looks like”

an effing

“mutant and should be burnt at the stake”.

That comment, with its foul language and its violent categorisation of women as “witches” who need to be disposed of, received the following comment from Facebook:

“We’ve reviewed the comment you reported for promoting graphic violence and found that it doesn’t violate our community standards.”

The reply continued:

“Please let us know if you see anything else that concerns you. We want to keep Facebook safe and welcoming for everyone.”

Well, if that is Facebook’s idea of a safe and welcoming environment, I would not like to see what it considers to be a no-go area.

Seriously—and I am being 100% serious—the responsible thing for Twitter and Facebook to do is to use algorithms to identify hate speech. Words such as “Islamophobe”, “murder” and “rape” could then be picked up, and the accounts in question could be investigated. It is totally irresponsible of social media platforms to allow unchecked and unregulated discourse. That would not happen in any other walk of life.

Twitter and Facebook appear to rely solely on reports by users of abuse and hate speech. They place the responsibility entirely on the user, and even then the pro-forma reporting procedure is often too simplistic to allow the actual problems and concerns to be accurately conveyed. Yes, the police can be notified, but we are all aware of the diminution in police numbers that has taken place under this Government and the previous coalition. I call on the Government to make funds available for training, and to increase police numbers in order to deal with online abuse. I was interested by my right hon. Friend’s suggestion that social media platforms should be asked to provide a levy to pay for those measures.

I have concentrated on abuse directed at female politicians, although I accept that online abuse takes many other forms and that many other groups are targeted, because this does seem to be a gender issue. Abuse is directed more towards female politicians than towards our male counterparts, and studies have shown that, in the United Kingdom, 82% of the abuse that is recorded comes from male sources. Social networks could take a strong and meaningful stance against harassment simply by applying the standards that we already apply in our public and professional lives. Wishing rape or other violence on women, or using derogatory slurs, would be unacceptable in most workplaces or communities, and those who engaged in such vitriol would be reprimanded or asked to leave. Why should that not be the response in our online lives?

Let us never forget that words carry weight, and that language has a consequence. Once it has been said, it cannot be unsaid. Whether it be uttered face to face or typed from behind a social media avatar, there is no

[Liz McInnes]

hiding from meaning, and we should confront now the ever-spreading plague of misogyny, abuse and threats online.

1.9 pm

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), and to the Backbench Business Committee. My right hon. Friend is a great champion of causes such as this, and I think that the passion that is being expressed in every speech shows how important the issue is.

Twenty-one years ago, I sat with a wise and, I now realise, very farsighted friend, and we talked about a new phenomenon called the internet. All that I knew about it was that the scientists at university used it to send messages to each other, but he said that we would live through a revolution as great and thrilling as that wrought by the proliferation of newsprint in the 17th century, which would lead to a new way of communicating—indeed, a complete shift in social discourse—and so it has proved. I have returned to that conversation many times over the past two decades, and never more so than in preparing for this debate. We, as legislators, are print children, on the whole, but we need to draft laws for our digital children.

I would like to quote from Lord Toulson's dissenting judgment in the case of *PJS v. News Group Newspapers*. I am sure that hon. Members know of that case. It involves a celebrity couple who were trying to stop the publication of their identities in print form, even though their names were widely quoted on the internet. Lord Toulson said:

"The court must live in the world as it is and not as it would like it to be"

and

"the court needs to be very cautious about granting an injunction preventing publication of what is widely known, if it is not to lose public respect for the law by giving the appearance of being out of touch with reality."

I am not passing comment on the rights or wrongs of that particular case, but making the point that we, as legislators, must adapt to the new lives, and threats, that face all of us today.

Online abuse is crime. It is not banter, it is not teasing, and it is not fair exercise of free speech. The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) spoke very powerfully. Indeed, many hon. Members—females, although I am glad now to see some men in the Chamber—have talked about their own experiences. I pay tribute to them, as I do to the victim statement that we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell). Online abuse, in and of itself, is a crime in terms of the effects that it has on its victims: anxiety, depression, and changes in everyday behaviour resulting in people staying at home and not being able to go to their jobs. Sometimes it leads to suicide. Crucially, online abuse is a gateway to real-world stalking, physical and sexual abuse, and even murder. Digital-Trust has highlighted the murders of Angela Hoyt, Ildiko Dohany, Lorna Smith and Sofyen Belamouadden, all of which began in the virtual world. Like many hon. Members, I am sure, every time I meet teachers they report online abuse as one of the factors in the growth of mental health problems in the young over the past decade.

In terms of crime prevention and reduction, there need to be constant changes to environmental and societal attitudes which run in parallel with, or sometimes slightly behind, changes in the law. Many hon. Members have said that there needs to be cultural change as well as legislative change, but looking back on social changes over the past half century, often we in this place are the leaders and society follows us.

**Anna Turley:** I am very grateful for the strength of feeling expressed across the House. I have introduced a private Member's Bill, to be debated in March, to address malicious communications on social media. I would be delighted to work with colleagues from across the House and, I hope, Ministers, to see whether we can use that as a vehicle for the legislative change that the hon. Lady talks about.

**Seema Kennedy:** I applaud the hon. Lady's private Member's Bill, and I am sure that lots of people will support her next year.

On legislative and societal changes going in step together, let us think about the strides that have been taken over the past 40 years in changing society's attitudes to physical and sexual violence against women and children. When I started at law school, rape in marriage was still allowed. When we were all at primary school, our teachers were allowed to smack us around the head. We had to legislate on these things before society followed us. It is incumbent on us, as legislators, to lead that charge.

Schools now take very seriously their duties to children with regard to bullying and what happens in the playground, but we must also make the virtual playground where many of our children and grandchildren spend so much time—indeed, we all do—a safe space for them. The internet, as compared with the real world, is still largely ungoverned. Some people argue that it is an ungovernable space where an online abuser's odious views go unchallenged. In fact, they are not just unchallenged but reinforced, amplified and nurtured.

Having spoken to my area's chief constable in Lancashire, I know how much time he and all his colleagues take in dealing with online abuse, yet, try as they might, they need more support. Victim Support has said—many hon. Members have quoted these statistics—that only 7,500 out of 125,000 police officers have been specially trained to investigate digital crime. I ask the Minister to make representations to Home Office Ministers about plans to increase that number.

There is currently a plethora of laws that deal with online abuse. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, very politely, used the word "piecemeal". I think we might better call it a ragbag of laws. I urge the Government to carry out a wholesale review of these laws so that we are not out of touch with reality. I wholeheartedly echo and agree with my right hon. Friend's suggested changes.

Our current law of libel had its origins in the 17th century proliferation of newsprint. We need to respond to the current revolution in communication and social discourse by legislating, in the words of Lord Toulson, for "the world as it is and not as"

we

"would like it to be."

1.16 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, for being escalated up the speaker's list to allow me to leave the debate to attend a Committee.

I extend my thanks to the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for securing this debate, and also thank the Backbench Business Committee. It strikes me that the Chamber is dominated by a female presence. I think that confirms what we might not know scientifically but know instinctively—that this issue confronts female MPs far more often than it should, and much of it, at its heart, is based on misogyny.

We have heard from a number of speakers, and we all understand that online abuse is a serious and growing problem. Unfortunately, we live in a world where it is deemed acceptable for some people—"keyboard warriors", as they would be called—to hide behind their computer or tablet and target abuse and aggression towards people they do not like, simply because they can. The anonymity and the distance from which the abuse is hurled gives the sender of these messages courage that they would not otherwise feel, with the added bonus that it is felt that whatever one wishes to say, however hurtful, aggressive, threatening or nasty, can be said with impunity. How cowardly! I applaud and fully support the work of the Reclaim the Internet campaign, which is a call for action to challenge abuse online, bringing together groups from across civic society to signal that enough is enough. Such online abuse is not acceptable, and anyone responsible for it must be held accountable.

One of the most pernicious aspects of online abuse is that it seeks to normalise bullying and intimidation of other people. We would not tolerate such abuse offline, so it must not be tolerated online. What kind of world are we building for our younger people when the UK Safer Internet Centre has published a study that found that of the 13 to 18-year-olds surveyed, 24% had been targeted due to their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or disability? Victim Support has found that 41% of young people have reported persistent and targeted bullying online from their peers. Those who send such messages are clearly intending to hurt, frighten or distress the recipients. Do they think of the consequences—the impact that their abuse has on the recipient? Sadly, I believe, they simply do not care.

In the political sphere, too, people use the internet to threaten violence, hurl vile abuse, or seek to silence the voice of others through intimidation. This is simply not acceptable, and that is the message that must go out from this place. Robust political debate is part of our public life, and we must foster and cherish it, but what cannot be tolerated is the lowering of political debate to threats of violence or to insults based on misogyny, homophobia, sexism, racism or disability. We must all counter the idea that it is legitimate to abuse someone online simply because they are in public life. That just erodes and cheapens democracy and ultimately legitimises abusive behaviour in wider society.

Regardless of political differences, debates must be conducted with respect, but too many people have forgotten that over the past couple of years. Online abuse can be just as destructive, distressing, upsetting and disempowering as physical abuse. As far as I can see, the perpetrator of such abuse seeks to shut up, close

down, and silence the voice of the person they choose to abuse. The police are working hard to adapt practices to cope with the new world in which we live, where the internet has added a new dimension to criminal acts—and make no mistake, criminal acts are what we are talking about here.

Online abuse is currently covered by at least 30 different pieces of legislation. The legislation must be fully utilised, and Victim Support is calling for a review to identify any possible gaps. That is an important point because it is estimated that 70% of all crime will be cyber-enabled in around five years' time, and the criminal justice system must be in a position to respond flexibly and adequately and to support victims when required. I would like to hear the Minister's thoughts on that.

The everyday, casual online abuse seen by too many people must not be viewed as harmless, or dismissed and deleted. It must be sought out and challenged. Like so many of my colleagues and too many of the ordinary hard-working people whom we represent, we have to face this casual abuse and, like so many others, I have until recently simply pressed the delete or block buttons whenever I have been in receipt of such nastiness. Now, however, I report abuse to the police and have had cause to do so recently in the light of the appalling and dreadful murder of the late Member for Batley and Spen.

No one should have to tolerate abuse or bullying—no matter what their line of work or what justification the sender of such abuse might have. It is not on. It seems that the most common victims of such abuse are women and children, but the problem is widespread and affects others outside those groups. If we are to seek any credibility in this place, we all need to send out a clear message and use our position as MPs and as leaders of political parties to condemn this behaviour unequivocally, as the First Minister of Scotland has done, wherever it comes from.

Like many hon. Members, I used to think that deleting such messages was enough, but no longer. MPs have a duty to ensure that messages are challenged and that doing so deters those who would engage in such activity. I sincerely hope that this debate will send a clear message to those who feel that they can abuse any person they choose by typing nasty and abusive comments with their keyboard that there is no hiding place. Such behaviour is cowardly and reprehensible, and we must encourage and support all victims of abuse to report it to the police. We as MPs must ensure that we do the same. It is time to reclaim social media from those who use it with impunity as a vehicle for working out their personal frustrations and tendency to bully. Enough is enough.

1.23 pm

**Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): I have met my fair share of bullies in my time. As you may have noticed, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am, as they used to say in my home town of Liverpool, a chap who is built like a brick outhouse—I think that is the parliamentary version of the term—so bullies have not really bothered me much over the years. However, I am aware, not least as a father, that the internet and social media have brought about two big changes that have meant that I probably would not have avoided bullying were I a teenager now.

[Kit Malthouse]

First, bullying is now 24/7. As other Members have said, it is inescapable. There is no refuge from bullying these days—no chance to get home, shut the back door and sit down to your fish fingers safe in the knowledge that it will not occur again, at least for a few hours. Secondly, social media has unfortunately decreased our children's resilience, creating a whole host of exploitable vulnerabilities, including eating disorders, self-harm, harmful sexual behaviour, depression and anxiety. For teenagers, many of whom are hard-wired to take the judgments of others to heart, the amplification of bullying that the online world allows will obviously lead to more permanent damage.

As many Members have said, it is pretty shocking that we have allowed things to get to this stage. We seem to have sleepwalked into an epidemic of terrible mental health, particularly among children, whose self-confidence has been wrecked by social media with its unrealistic expectations and the kind of digital solipsism that it seems to encourage. Perhaps it is because we have been too wrapped up in our own smartphones to notice their obsession—too wrapped up to remember that there are two distinct types of people in society: adults and children. It is the job of adults to make decisions about the boundaries that protect children from harm even when they do not always like it. Instead, I fear that we have become carried away by technology, which has led us to become too indulgent to be seen to be backtracking.

The current generation of teenagers are glued, perhaps irreversibly, to a social media world filled with images of continuously perfect, happy people—so obviously fictional—paired with the unavoidable realisation that they can never attain that ideal. The result is both an insatiable sense of entitlement combined with a crushing hopelessness, which can only lead to self-loathing and anger. They are too often made to feel like failures. Throw into that mix the pressure of exams and the signal sent to children that their entire future and value as a person rests on their academic performance and social standing at school, and it is no wonder that cyber-bullying is the trigger for a whole host of problems. Such pressures contribute to deep unhappiness and many feel the need to put on a brave face and not burden their families, which compounds the isolation. As the president of ChildLine, Esther Rantzen, wrote recently, unhappiness and low self-esteem are the main new phenomena that the organisation is seeing. It only appeared in the top five of children's worries a couple of years ago but accounted for 35,244 of their counselling sessions last year alone. Make no mistake, we have done little to halt the trend and it is only going to get worse. We must not consign the next generation of teenagers to the same fate.

Turning to the main subject of the debate, the resilience-sapping effect of social media and the addiction to smartphones are far more fundamental and intractable than the cyber-bullying issue, which is a product of them. There is much to be said about how we tackle cyber-bullying. Many people need to be involved in that conversation and consultation, which will have to include the mega-corporations, such as Facebook, that are the common platforms on which the problem occurs. We have let the resilience issue get out of control as a result

of complacency in Parliament and an inertia in law, and we need to address them with more urgency than the bullying.

Like many Members, I hope that the response to the bullying issue will take the shape of a new online offences Act, which would replace the 30-plus pieces of legislation currently covering online abuse. It would include, among other things, a specific online abuse offence as well as an extensive definition of the duties of internet service providers in relation to young people. On resilience, we also need to get on with a children and young persons Act that is fit for this age, in which we can clearly define the duties of parents, in law, to help them cope with the impact of social media on their children. It is plainly not right that under-16s spend an average of three hours a day online, making them, according to experts, much more likely to suffer mental health problems, or that two in three 12 to 15-year-olds have their own smartphone given that parents have no idea what they are doing on them.

Spending too much time on social media has been shown to inhibit personal development by many different researchers, including in research carried out by the Government. We must be less complacent about the evidence. The change has been allowed to happen partly owing to parliamentary complacency, but also parental naivety and short-sightedness, and we need to put things right. No one is particularly to blame. That this House has failed to consider the issue properly is down to the same reason that parents across the country and around the world get caught out so badly by the change. Nothing comparable was around when we were growing up, and we are not equipped with the knowledge or understanding to guide children in their use of social media, especially as children themselves seem to be driving the evolution of the platforms on a daily basis.

The pace of change also explains how the main pieces of legislation on children are so out of date. The Children and Young Persons Act 1933 and the Children Act 1989 constructed the framework under which we still operate today, but obviously they do not have anything to say about parents' duties to children in the social media age or about cyber-bullying. Making it harder still, it appears that getting the guidance and supervision right requires a level of intrusiveness that was not commonplace among parents of previous generations, one that children today will certainly resent and resist. Understandably, given where we are now, any group of teenagers would react with horror at the idea of handing their smartphones in at the beginning of the school day and picking them up at home time.

**Seema Kennedy:** My hon. Friend says that teenagers might resist that, but he began by saying that there are two groups of people in this world—adults and children—and surely it is incumbent on us adults to make them give these things up.

**Kit Malthouse:** Exactly, as I was about to say. Let me continue: but I will be firm here and say that the reason we have not done something in a systematic way, when teachers and experts on children have been telling us for some time that there was trouble brewing, is down to an increased weakness of parents and some teachers who act as though it was the children who should set the rules. Once again, adults seem to be unwilling to act as

adults, meaning action has been weak or tentative. However, given the gravity of the situation in children's mental health, in particular, we obviously cannot afford for that to continue. We need a new direction from which to approach this important area, but it is right to deal with the causes as well as the fallout.

I fear that this situation is again down to an indulgence that leads people to the conclusion that we can never declare that what someone is doing is harmful or bad for them, even when that person is not yet an adult and cannot be expected to understand properly what is good for them. Increased funding for talking therapies for distressed young people, which everybody has been pushing for over the past few months, is right, but no amount of therapy will stem the tide of the children's mental health crisis if the root cause of why we need this resilience is not addressed.

I agree with many hon. Members who have spoken today about the need for legislation to clarify and consolidate the law relating to offences committed online. More fundamentally, however, we need to look more seriously at the resilience of children, at availability and at the time they spend online, and decide for ourselves, as parents and as a country, whether we should set firmer boundaries about what they can and cannot do in their own time.

1.32 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for securing this debate, through the Backbench Business Committee. We have heard some powerful and personal accounts from Members from across the Chamber, and it goes without saying that online abuse is a severe and expanding issue. It is one that the Scottish National party utterly condemns, and my party supports any measures that may ensure that those responsible for this abuse are held accountable for their actions. I know those sentiments are carried throughout this place, on a cross-party basis, and the consensus on this issue is important in order to tackle it. The scale of online abuse is truly shocking; there is much evidence to suggest that it has become incredibly widespread. The chief executive of the College of Policing, Alex Marshall, has stated that there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that complaints relating to social media now make up at least half of all calls to the police.

There has been equally widespread coverage of online abuse, particularly in the tabloid press, although some may contend that this has the potential to add to the problem, rather than address it. Sometimes the headlines and tabloid splashes can detract from the severity of the reality of online abuse. The think tank Demos has conducted research suggesting that about 12,000 threatening tweets containing the word "rape" were sent from UK accounts in one year. That is just one example of the plethora of misogynist and aggressively abusive tweets sent to women online. The recent Gamergate controversy showed some horrific online abuse of women in the video game industry. What was truly shocking was the herd mentality and the co-ordinated campaigns of abuse targeting individuals. Gamergate garnered much media attention stateside, and measures to tackle online harassment are being taken more seriously by Congress as a result.

This abuse is often vicious and nasty. Although most of us will have the strength of character to deal with it, it does not make it any more acceptable. We also have a duty of care to our young people, many of whom will not be well placed to deal with this abuse and cyber-bullying. I commend the Department for Education's efforts in this area, particularly the advice it issues to help deal with cyber-bullying. The work of organisations such as ChildLine and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children is even more praiseworthy; their freephone helplines are an invaluable resource, as is their online advice for those being bullied. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the work of the Time for Inclusive Education campaign in Scotland. In a very short space of time, the campaign has managed to garner the support of the main political parties and of high-profile figures across Scotland. Equality training is an important measure in our schools. Teachers need to be trained on LGBTI+, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex+, issues, and that includes recognising the signs of bullying and cyber-bullying, so that they may act to put a stop to individual cases.

The repercussions of cyber-bullying are serious; young and impressionable people can suffer very serious losses in confidence. More seriously, it can lead to depression and self-harm, and, tragically and regrettably, as we have heard, it has led to young people taking their lives. I welcome any efforts that would strengthen legislation in this place, or in the devolved institutions, to help tackle this abuse. I would also like to reiterate today to anyone listening to this debate who is the victim of online abuse or bullying: you are not alone, speak to someone you trust and do not hesitate to contact the police to report it.

We have a duty here to work together to tackle cyber-abuse and bullying proactively. As high-profile individuals, we have no doubt all experienced some form of it ourselves, and can no doubt empathise with all victims of this kind of abuse. We are their voices, and we must use our voices to effect real change.

1.37 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing this debate, through the Backbench Business Committee. Let me start my contribution by saying how much I value social media. As an MP, it allows me to engage directly with constituents, enabling me to promote the work I do. Social media also makes it easier for my constituents to contact me and for me to hear at first hand from my constituents about the issues that are important to them. I also know that the general public value their use of social media. It has become a staple part of our daily lives—my wife would probably say it has become far too much of a staple. Tools such as Facebook and Twitter allow people to keep in touch with one another regardless of whether they are in different corners of the globe or, sadly, just in different corners of the living room. In the UK, Facebook has 32 million users and Twitter now has 16 million users tweeting on a daily basis. The vast majority of people who use social media do so in a respectable and proper manner. They engage with other users in a friendly and cordial manner. As a politician, I can testify that the

[Gavin Newlands]

overwhelming majority of people who talk to me online, even those who disagree, do so with respect—or something close to it. However, as with a lot of things, there are always a few who ruin it for everyone else, and unfortunately social media and other online forums do have a small but significant minority who engage in abusive and poisonous behaviour.

Like every other political party, the SNP condemns all online abuse and supports any measure to ensure that those involved are held to account by the security and policing authorities. The First Minister of Scotland has addressed this issue and is one of UK politics' best users of Twitter to communicate and engage with the electorate. She has previously said that robust political debate forms an important part of a democracy, but that debate and discussion must be conducted in a polite and appropriate manner. I think that is a message that we can all agree on. I do not accept the view that public servants are fair game to be abused and that such abuse is part and parcel of being a politician. Any abuse, no matter who is on the receiving end of it, should be condemned—that includes threats to politicians. Like many Members in this Chamber, I have had some abuse, but the cowards that troll online are usually men who reserve some of their worst abuse for female Members. These are not real men hiding behind their keyboards and their anonymous user names, but small and pathetic men whose actions can ultimately have serious and tragic repercussions.

Politicians are not the abuser's only target. It appears that no one can escape the poison that blights the internet. I spoke in the debate during carers' week and mentioned that a lot of carers were tweeting about their experiences of caring for a loved one. That online campaign was incredibly informative and provided an insight into the issues that carers face. However, it is shameful that even carers cannot escape the abuse from the trolls.

We need to get to the bottom of why so many people think it is okay to send abusive online messages. In 2014, 1,209 people were convicted of internet trolling under section 127 of the Communications Act 2003. Of those convicted, only 155 were jailed for sending messages or other material that were grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character. The truth is that there are far, far more people engaging in abusive activity than the 1,200 people who were convicted, let alone the 155 who served some jail time. The scale of the problem is unclear. The think-tank Demos found that 10,000 tweets aggressively attacking someone were sent from UK accounts over a three-week period.

As a father of two young girls, I am particularly concerned about the increasing incidence of children being bullied online. The rise of cyber-bullying has allowed bullies to extend their vicious behaviour beyond the classroom. There are currently no official statistics on the number of children who are bullied, but from research studies and from what children tell us, we know that bullying is an issue that affects almost all children in some way. DoSomething.org, one of the largest organisations for young people on social change, suggests that nearly 43% of children have been bullied online, with this abusive behaviour occurring on more than one occasion.

Equally worrying is that 90% of teens who witness social media bullying say that they have ignored it. Kids who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and intersexed, who have a disability, and who are from African, Caribbean, Asian, middle eastern and other minority groups are far more likely to encounter such cyber-bullying.

We must also consider why people on the receiving end of such abusive online behaviour choose to ignore it. We simply would not accept it if we witnessed abuse in person in the street or in the classroom. We should send a message that cyber-bullying and any form of online abuse cannot be tolerated and should be reported at every opportunity.

As I mentioned earlier, the rise of the internet and social media has made it easier for women to be attacked and abused. The revenge porn helpline has received almost 4,000 calls in the past year from people receiving sexually abusive messages online. Reported cases of revenge porn—the sharing of explicit or sexual images without consent—have risen markedly, with alleged victims ranging from 11 years old to pensioners. Two thirds of the incidents involved women under the age of 30, with suspects mainly being former partners. There were eight complaints from females to every one complaint from a male. Such statistics sound all too similar to the incidence of domestic violence.

Undoubtedly, this is an extremely difficult problem to solve, but work is being done to reduce cyber-bullying. For instance, the Scottish National party Government have funded Respectme, which was mentioned earlier. Scotland's anti-bullying service, which acts as a source of information for young people in Scotland, has created and made available publications to raise awareness on the issues of cyber-bullying. Respectme has highlighted the fact that bullying is bullying whether it takes place in the street, in the playground or online and we should treat it all with equal import.

We need to develop effective policies to tackle online bullying in all its various forms. We should send out a central message that anyone who has been a victim of online abuse should not hesitate to report it to the police immediately. I agree with the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) that companies such as Facebook and Twitter could and should do much more to investigate or block abusive posts. No one should have to go home from work or school and experience online bullying. As well as offering support to the victims of online bullying, we must also take serious action to deal with the perpetrators of this vicious, poisonous and, ultimately, cowardly behaviour.

1.44 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): My apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker, for stepping out of the Chamber, but I was involved in a school visit. I thank the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) for securing this very important debate. I also thank all those Members who have spoken before me and whom I have been able to hear.

Technology is a central part of our lives today; it is a tool. Sadly, used maliciously, it can be turned into a weapon that can have, and indeed has had, damaging

and sometimes devastating consequences for victims. As others have mentioned, Members of this House have been victims of such abuse, and some have been sufficiently frightened by the abuse that they have been afraid to go home at the weekend. Most victims do not have the benefit of the police and parliamentary support that we have here. Like all bullying, bullies tend to target people who already feel vulnerable. Members have rightly acknowledged the gaps and the need for action, legislation, police and prosecutors, and, most importantly, awareness.

I want to focus my contribution on online abuse and harassment in schools and the importance of effective and consistent school management and curriculum policies to complement the effective legislation that we also need. I am honoured to be on the Women and Equalities Committee under the chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Basingstoke. We have been addressing the issue of sexual harassment and violence in schools. Our report is not quite ready, but I am sure that my Chair will not mind if I give a little flavour of what we have experienced. We were shocked by the extent that sexual imagery, abusive sexual relationships and objectification of women have been normalised by young people. We had two sessions—one with young men and the other with young women—in which we were told about the experiences of young people of the use and misuse of technology in and around the school environment. If we do not understand and address that misogyny, homophobia, Islamophobia, racism and all the other kinds of abuse, we risk turning victims into criminals, which means that they will not get the support that they so badly need.

I wish to focus my remarks on the experience brought to me by one of my constituents, a headteacher at a successful and thriving secondary school. Recent safeguarding investigations introduced him to the shocking mobile and cyber-world in which virtually every child in his school and, he presumes, in other local schools and therefore nationally seem to be engaged for unfeasibly large proportions of their days and nights. What happened in his school started with the exchange of photos between two students who were in a consensual relationship, but it escalated. The images got out. There was blackmail and violence, and the police were involved. Criminal charges were considered. What started as a consensual relationship ended up as truly violent abuse, and it could have been prevented.

The situation raised some really important aspects of child online and mobile safety and the equalities agenda, which appear to be being ignored. The headteacher is seeking a body of work in some key areas that has cross-party and organisational support that can help schools and parents to safeguard children much more effectively.

It is right to focus on strengthening the law, but we need to look at a parallel solution if we are not to put thousands of teenagers at risk of criminal charges when education and child protection are more in order. Although tackling offenders and strengthening the law are very important, they are only a small part of what needs to be done and are not on their own a real solution. If we do not want young people to be needlessly and unfairly criminalised, elements of the law and the context of the online abuse must be thoroughly analysed before changes are made. We must focus not so much on reaction, but on prevention. The law is not always the correct tool,

and it must not be used when young people are engaging in unwise activities—as so many do—which relate to the expectation and culture of a mobile and cyber environment in which appropriate adults have virtually no presence and where, too often, we leave them abandoned and to fend for themselves.

My constituent contends that a strong positive culture must dominate any community, including the online and mobile community, because when it is absent, there will never be a vacuum—a “street culture” will fill the void. Alas, he fears and he sees that this is the case with the mobile and cyber-worlds that our children spend so much of their day and night lives inhabiting. We need to take care not to end up targeting and criminalising young people who are, in fact, victims. This will require significant training and support for the police, as other Members have mentioned, and for others whose response to such crime already appears to be under-confident and very variable.

My constituent subscribes to a restorative justice approach in his school, and that might be appropriate in cases where mitigating factors are considered. He asserts that the ignored fact is that the vast majority of young people are already mobile and online victims in a largely unsupervised cyber-world. Although the internet gets considerable attention from safeguarding organisations and in training, mobile activity and mobile-based abuse are, in fact, even more rife but more neglected by us adults. Parents, teachers and other adults normally responsible for the routine safety of children are best placed to supervise and guide young people, yet they are largely absent from the potentially dangerous environment and too little is being done to address that omission.

There is an over-focus on the internet and the wrong applications, such as Facebook, because they are what we older people use and are familiar with. The mobile world and the dark web get less attention, yet they are part of most children’s experiences—perhaps the dark web to a lesser degree. There are lots of apps. I know Snapchat, but I do not use it. Hon. Members have probably never even heard of other apps unless we have asked our kids to tell us, and that does not always happen. The mobile and online culture in which our children live and grow up—the ground is established in the primary years for some of them but in early secondary for many more—is their normality.

This normalisation, with no appropriate adult presence to challenge it, is what leads to the lack of reporting of sexual and other mobile, online and cyber-abuse. We must deal with the issue that young people do not want to go to court, or they do not want perpetrators to be punished. The idea that abuse is not worth reporting is not necessarily an indictment of the criminal justice system, but it may not be considered worth reporting when it is seen as normalised.

Data from police forces and court proceedings are only a small subset of the true or possible dataset. The reality is that the relative lack of adult presence in the mobile and cyber-worlds of children, including the practitioners responsible for keeping children safe, means that conclusions drawn on available quantitative data must be received cautiously. We need to establish a different online, mobile and cyber-culture and skill-up children, parents and other adults.

Police, children’s services, health and education staff need consistent training on child exploitation and on how to support victims. In short, parents and other

[Ruth Cadbury]

responsible adults just do not know how to be part of the mobile and cyber-world. Schools have a responsibility in this debate and in the remedies. Some suggestions that come from the work that our headteachers have done include every school having an equalities and safeguarding committee and updating the behaviour policy to have a strong safeguarding structure and training for parents, staff and, of course, students. Students should be engaged in this work and in policy development and roll out in an equal ratio to adults.

Heads suggest using up-to-date information and communications technology and security in the school ICT environment; ensuring staff, students and parents are clear on the law and people's rights; and encouraging a transparent culture where children welcome parents and school staff interrogating their mobile devices as a matter of course. That is a challenge for parents, but we need to think about that in the context of an overall policy.

Heads also suggest developing clear, consistent procedures and guidance for investigating safeguarding, social media, sexual exploitation and mobile and online incidents, including the protection of staff investigating such incidents, while taking account of pupil privacy and so on; working with relevant organisations such as the police, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and others; and using pupil ICT champions to keep schools up to date with developments in social media and portable apps and to help inform e-safety curriculum developments.

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Lady refers to the difficulty with teenagers. Does she agree that we should perhaps look as a House at whether parents should have a legal duty to be aware of what their children are doing online, in the same way as we have legal duties to ensure that our children are not exposed to other dangers?

**Ruth Cadbury:** The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting issue. As a parent of two young adults, I have always wondered why all sorts of people are required to do all sorts of things in respect of the children in their care, yet there seems to be no legal duty that a woman signs when she pops out a baby. I am sure that people far more legally qualified than I am can respond in detail to the hon. Gentleman's interesting and pertinent question.

I have concluded my core points. We need to address online bullying and abuse with a whole raft of mixed approaches that include not only enforcement, criminal charges and policing but public policy and education policy solutions, so that victims are not criminalised.

1.55 pm

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on securing this debate. I will not go on too long and dilute the quality of the debate. I promise to make a short speech. [Interruption.] Yes, I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate that. In another short speech—my maiden speech—I said that I would be an advocate in this place for the internet and online sector of the British economy because it creates lots of jobs. That does not mean that I am an apologist for that sector or, indeed, that I excuse some of the negative consequences that have occurred.

All the stakeholders in the internet economy and, indeed, we as legislators and all other players have an awesome responsibility to ensure that we create a safe environment for our children in particular. The internet has created an environment in which adults behave like children and children behave like adults in a way that we have never really understood before.

Many Members have commented previously on the great work being undertaken in schools in educating children about online bullying. I have seen such programmes in action in schools in my constituency, and I applaud the great work of teachers, as do many other Members.

Members have mentioned the prevalence of children having mobile phones these days. Parents often find it difficult to lock or unlock mobile phones, or to work out how to make them secure in the way that they perhaps have confidence in doing with computers. The average Brit looks at their mobile phone 100 times a day. More people would be willing give up chocolate, showers or, indeed, sex than their mobile phones.

**John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Which are you giving up?

**Nigel Huddleston:** All.

I will leave hon. Members with this comment: today is the first time in my entire time in Parliament when I have not looked at my mobile phone to see abuse on Twitter, Facebook or in an email. I lost my mobile phone 14 hours ago. It has been one of the most relaxing and productive days of my time in Parliament, and I highly recommend it.

1.57 pm

**John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on securing this debate and outlining at the beginning the homophobic and racist abuse and the horrors of child abuse that we often see on the internet. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) described the many ways in which abuse can take place.

The hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) issued a stark warning that children were losing their ability to empathise which we all found striking and interesting. I was particularly happy to hear her description of her doorstep visits to trolls. For a moment, I almost felt sorry for the pathetic creatures when I imagined her turning up and remonstrating with them.

Members have made a variety of speeches describing their personal experiences. I was struck by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) describing a victim's terrifying experience online. Particularly moving, I thought, was my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) talking about her experiences of being at the receiving end of abuse from online cowards.

Today, we are all connected. We use the internet to conduct business, for entertainment and to connect with our friends through social media. Our mobile phones in our pockets ensure that we are available anytime, anywhere and that we can instantly share photos with family, friends and complete strangers. For

the vast majority of people, that connectivity has enhanced our lives, but as the historian Melvin Kranzberg wrote in the first of his six laws of technology,

“Technology is neither good nor bad; nor is it neutral.”

As we have heard, online abuse is one of the negative consequences of advances in online technology.

While social media can be a platform to share a happy family photograph, it can also be a platform to share content intended to humiliate with as large an audience as possible. While an iPhone can be a helpful tool in keeping in touch with friends, it can also be an instrument through which an individual is harassed and intimidated. While Twitter can provide an opportunity for witty banter, as Members of this House well know, it can also be used by cowardly bullies hiding behind anonymity to send abuse. As the debate has shown, all political parties have sent out strong and clear messages that this behaviour must be strenuously tackled, and we must consider every possible method of dealing with it, including strengthening existing legislation.

Children and young people are often the first to embrace and adapt to changes in technology. However, that also means that they are more likely to be victims of online abuse. Much of that abuse can come from their peers, and it has been exacerbated by the use of social media and the widespread availability of smartphones with cameras. In late 2004, happy slapping became a youth craze throughout the United Kingdom—many people have forgotten about it, but it was covered widely in the tabloids at the time. It involved filming minor acts of violence, such as hitting or slapping a victim, and then circulating the videos via Bluetooth on mobile phones. However, it escalated into more serious assaults, sexual assaults and, in some instances, manslaughter. Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter have provided further platforms for cowards. The intention of such videos is clearly to humiliate and intimidate the victim, to make them feel small and worthless, and to share their misery with the world, increasing the feeling that the whole world is against them. Rightly, these videos are roundly condemned. They are removed—sometimes—by site administrators. They are sometimes, but not often enough, investigated by the police.

Other types of abuse are more subtle and more difficult to act against. Embarrassing pictures or videos, altered photos, or photos and videos taken without an individual's permission can be widely shared without consent. Classic bullying behaviour can manifest itself much more easily online. Victims can be ridiculed and singled out in group messages, rumours can be spread quickly and widely, and victims can be excluded from online activity. The ability to go online does not create bullying, but it helps it to go unnoticed away from the classroom and the playground.

Similarly, those who are most often targeted by conventional bullying are also targeted by online abuse. In February 2016 the UK Safer Internet Centre published a study that found that 24% of those 13 to 18-year-olds surveyed had been targeted due to their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or disability, or due to the fact that they were transgendered.

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful contribution. One key aspect of this abuse, which he has illustrated so well, is the ability for people

on the internet to be anonymous. Is it time for the House to come to a view about whether we should allow internet anonymity to persist in this country?

**John Nicolson:** It is an interesting issue: do we have an entitlement to anonymity? Perhaps we do, and perhaps we should preserve that. However, I would have to think about that. My answer is I am not sure. I was interested in the suggestion by a Labour Member that Facebook and Twitter should use technology to identify certain troll words and that using them should result automatically in the suspension of the accounts concerned. Perhaps the Minister will address those issues, among others, in his speech, and perhaps he can go away and look at them later.

One in 25 of the young people who spoke about this issue in a variety of surveys said they were singled out for abuse all or most of the time. That is a horrendous thing for young people to have to deal with. Teenagers with disabilities, and especially teenagers from African-Caribbean, Asian, middle eastern and other minority groups, were much more likely to encounter cyber-bullying.

To target cyber-bullying north of the border, the Scottish Government have funded Respectme—an anti-bullying service that acts as a source of information for young people. It has created and made available publications to raise awareness of cyber-bullying. The service works particularly well with adults involved in the lives of children and young people, giving them the practical skills and confidence to deal with children who are bullied and those who bully others. Respectme is keen to stress that, no matter where bullying takes place, it needs to be challenged, and that is a message worth repeating: anyone suffering from bullying, whether online or not, must report it and stand up to it.

Online, children and young people are also in danger of sexual abuse. A recent study by UNICEF, which was published in June 2016, suggested that eight out of 10 18-year-olds worldwide believe they or their friends are in danger of being sexually abused or taken advantage of as a result of online activity. The ability to remain anonymous online, or to take on another identity, is a contributory factor; it leads to an increased likelihood of people receiving unwanted sexual comments, unsolicited explicit material or pressure to participate in sexual activity. As we have heard from many speakers today, that problem is also experienced by adult women, with applications such as Snapchat and Tinder often providing an easy way for men to harass them.

Another increasing phenomenon is revenge porn, which involves sharing private sexual images and recordings without consent and with the intention of causing harm. The revenge porn helpline has received almost 4,000 calls in the last year alone, with cases reported involving children as young as 11 years old. Furthermore, attempts to stigmatise women are extremely common. The think-tank Demos found that 10,000 tweets were sent from UK accounts in a single three-week period aggressively attacking individuals as a “slut” or a “whore”.

Women in public life are often prime targets for online abuse. In Scotland, the three largest political parties are led by women, two of them gay. All three women have to deal routinely with sexist, misogynistic and homophobic tweets. The Scottish Conservative party leader, Ruth Davidson, has suffered horrendous homophobic abuse, and has handled it with humour, honesty and courage.

**Kit Malthouse:** One revelation that has come out of the awful murder of Jo Cox is the amount of online abuse directed at Members of Parliament, but particularly female Members of Parliament—or, indeed, anybody who is not a heterosexual white male. Would it be appropriate for the parliamentary authorities to publish an annual report on the levels, content and types of abuse Members of Parliament receive? It comes as a surprise to most right-thinking members of the public to know that their Member of Parliament receives that kind of material.

**John Nicolson:** That is an absolutely excellent idea. One of the great things about this debate is that people have been able to share their experiences. I suspect that many Members—especially some of the men—are quite surprised to discover just how widespread the problem is, so that would be an excellent thing for the House to do.

In many ways, the online world has enhanced our democracy by allowing people to interact with politicians in a way they could not before. Robust political debate is part of our public life, and we must cherish it, even when it uses language we might not personally use. What cannot be tolerated, however, is people debasing political debate with threats of violence, insults and abuse based on misogyny, homophobia, sexism and racism.

Opposition to online abuse is something that unites all our political parties. However, it is not just politicians who suffer such online abuse when they are famous. High-profile television personalities, journalists, academics, actors and sports people are all subject to abuse, whether it is petty and crude or threatening and vicious.

Online, many people seem to lose a sense of themselves and say things that they would never dream of saying in person. Quite often when I get abuse, I make a point of writing to people to ask whether they can imagine saying such things to me in real life. Of course they cannot imagine it, so why on earth do they feel free to say it simply because it is online? However, hiding behind a pseudonym and a cartoon profile picture does not make the abuse any less real. We have a duty of care as politicians, and it is vital that we send out a strong message that online abuse is wrong always.

One clear message from this debate is that, as we have heard repeatedly, Twitter and Facebook are hopelessly inadequate when it comes to their response to online, and sometimes very violent, bullying. It seems that the House, across both sides and all parties, wants the Minister to tackle Facebook and Twitter on our behalf and, much more importantly, on behalf of all our constituents. I look forward to hearing what he has to say on the matter.

2.11 pm

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I, too, thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this important debate. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart) on securing it. The contributions have been characterised by reasonable, well-informed arguments that reflect the consensus around the House and a desire for a constructive improvement in the situation that many of our constituents, and we as Members of Parliament, face.

I may have mentioned it in the past but before entering this House I spent many years as an engineer, building the networks that eventually formed the internet. I did that because I see technology as democratising and enabling, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) also emphasised: technology as something that builds bridges and connects people rather than something that bullies and snoops on people. I spend a lot of time in this House and outside it talking about the positive benefits that technology, and particularly the internet, can bring if harnessed properly. For most of us, the internet is a window on the world. It is a place to learn about what is happening, to keep in touch with friends or make new ones, to buy something, to find a new job, to study or to play games. However, the increasing presence of online abuse means that, all too often, the internet is a place where people do not feel safe. As my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) said, technology is a tool that can be turned into a weapon.

As we become ever more connected, there are fewer safe spaces from bullying and harassment. The hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire reminded us of some of the horrifying statistics on cyber-bullying. One third of children have been a victim, a quarter have come across racist or sexist messages online and, according to the Safer Internet Centre, four in five teenagers saw or heard online hate in 2015; that is 80% of our children. The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) emphasised that online porn is available that targets children as young as 11, and the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) suggested that we are sleep-walking into a mental health epidemic because of the impact of bullying and online hate on our young people.

Citizens in this country enjoy the right to walk down the street without being attacked or harassed. When that happens, the police act. Digital citizens should enjoy the same rights online. As the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) said, we need to protect our digital citizens. In his short but powerful contribution, the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) said that we should focus on our duty to protect young people. To coin a phrase, digital citizens deserve digital rights.

It is the Government's primary responsibility to keep their citizens safe, but they are failing to do that for citizens online. This is not a tech issue. As the right hon. Member for Basingstoke emphasised, it is about standards, interoperability, protocols, control, industry co-operation, self-regulation and, if necessary, legislation. We cannot just look at what we have now and try to patch over the problems. As well as the Government, internet companies also have a responsibility to keep the internet safe. I welcome the fact that the big internet firms are beginning to take that responsibility seriously, particularly when it comes to children. However, in my view, and in the view of many on both sides of the House, they have been too slow and are still not doing enough. It was great news that Twitter decided to add a button to report abuse, for example, but why on earth did it take seven years to think of it?

It is important that we get the principles right, rather than just trying to keep up with the latest technology, putting regulatory sticking plasters over whatever the

latest innovation is. We cannot keep having this battle with every new internet giant or ubiquitous application.

As a woman engineer in a predominantly male industry, and particularly when I worked for Ofcom, the communications regulator, I remember the outrage voiced by many in the tech sector when asked simply to consider taking responsibility for content. Their main accusation was of undermining freedom of speech, as my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) highlighted. They also called parents irresponsible if their children found porn online, and accused women in particular of being over-sensitive when we objected to violent images of rape or to misogynist threats. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods) reminded us, it is women who are often victims of online hate. The hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) has a very robust approach to challenging online abuse, but unfortunately we cannot all emulate that.

I remind the industry players of the period when many championed what I would call a wild west approach to online safety. I do not want to undermine the work that they are doing now, and which I will come to, but to highlight that some of the lack of trust in the internet and the reluctance of many to go online can be traced to those early mistakes, when the right support and protection for consumers was not put in place. We now face a new frontier in citizen data control, and many of the same industry players—Facebook, Twitter, Google and so on—are still on the back foot on this. We need to give citizens and consumers control of their data.

On the subject of online outrage, the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) highlighted the Gamergate scandal. A recent period of online vilification came when I had the audacity to suggest that misogyny in games could perhaps be signposted; not necessarily regulated or eliminated, but simply signposted. That caused outrage among many in the industry, who still do not recognise the importance of social responsibility when it comes to the internet.

As has been said, there are many very bright people in this sector. If they can build algorithms to snoop on our email or phonebook, or to tell us who to be friends with or what washing machine to buy, they should be able to crack down more effectively on abuse and harassment and put me in control of my own data. The new platforms need to understand that. Perhaps it is not seen as a major priority because it does not come with a revenue stream attached, but safeguarding people should always be the No. 1 priority. That is not only because it is the right thing to do, but because if we allow the internet to become a place where only those who shout the loudest or who use the most appalling abuse can have a voice, people will turn away from using it. As the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) said, those involved in such abuse must be held to account.

I am particularly pleased that the motion makes reference to training and education for the police and for young people. I welcome the recent Stand Up to Bullying Day, held on 5 July and organised by the Diana Award, which seeks to build digital resilience. I also welcome the work done by many third sector organisations. This is not a problem that will take care of itself without significant and sustained action from industry and Government.

I also welcome the Reclaim the Internet campaign on which many across the House, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), are working. I am sure that my right hon. Friend looked to the Digital Economy Bill to provide some appropriate responses to online abuse, but I am afraid that we did not see any. I hope the Minister will be delighted to learn that Labour Members intend to make significant improvements to the Bill. A successful digital economy requires its citizens and consumers to be protected and empowered. Governments and platforms need to use technology to support citizens, instead of leaving the haters to attack them.

2.22 pm

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** I am grateful to have the chance to speak. I have no idea how long I have got at the Dispatch Box, but I will keep going until you indicate otherwise, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I can help the Minister by saying that if he works on the basis of around 10 minutes, I think we will all be happy.

**Mr Vaizey:** Let us go for the 10-minute special, then.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for calling this important debate. I was lucky enough to work with her when she was Secretary of State. She took on two important issues at that time: Leveson and the issue of press regulation, and equal marriage. She handled both with aplomb, and she has since shown the House how one transitions from such a position to a new role. She has taken a huge and leading role in the House on women and equalities issues. She has certainly pushed forward the important agenda of online abuse, so it is no surprise at all to find her leading this debate and setting out for the Government some very clear approaches and suggestions, which it behoves us to take seriously.

It is worth recalling that when the matter has been raised in the House—for example, when my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry) first raised the question of children's access to adult content online—it has resulted in action. Debates in this House may sometimes appear to be simply an exchange of views between Government and Members of the House, but, because this agenda is so fast moving, the House has a great deal of influence on the direction of Government policy. Without wishing to single out individuals too much, I have to say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke has pushed the matter forward, not least the change in legislation on revenge pornography last year.

It would be remiss of me to go through every speech that has been made. Some 18 or 19 hon. Members have made contributions, all of which have been serious and worth while. Because this was a lengthy and detailed debate, I appreciated the odd moment of light-heartedness, not least when my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) told us that she responds to online abuse with a picture of a kitten. That particularly appealed to me, because I have a picture, which is now well known, of a kitten sitting on my shoulder when I visited Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. I will use that in future to respond to my online trolls.

[Mr Vaizey]

I was also amused when my right hon. Friend the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) complained that teenagers now live in a world in which they are surrounded by perfect people who are wonderful to look at. I wondered why he thought that that was a problem when we all exist in the perfect world of the Palace of Westminster, where people are charming and lovely, as we have particularly found during the last week or so.

Four clear issues emerged from the debate. Let me briefly pause to put them in context. The Government are, quite rightly, committed to an open internet. When I attend international forums, I find that it is very important that the UK, along with our allies, is committed to what we call the multi-stakeholder approach for internet governance. That involves civic society, business and Governments working together to keep the internet open and free. Authoritarian-inclined regimes would like to regulate the internet, restrict freedom of speech and clamp down on innovation. The Government of this country do, however, regard things that are illegal and wrong offline to be illegal and wrong online. Hon. Members have made the point that some people seem to believe that the rules of behaviour and the legal rules that we all live by in the physical world somehow do not apply on the internet. That is absolutely not the case.

The UK has led the way in approaching the issue from a perspective of self-regulation rather than legislation. Self-regulation works because it brings about partnerships and helps us to move forward more quickly. A good example is the creation of the Internet Watch Foundation, which was the first charity to focus on dealing with images of child sexual abuse. It is a model that has been copied around the world, and it became incredibly important in driving forward the recent work with search engines, such as Google, to make searching for and discovering images of child abuse online much, much more difficult. We have worked with the Internet Watch Foundation to ensure that internet service providers had the funding to increase their capacity, and we have worked with technology providers on the use of technology that enables images to be matched and traced, and that makes it easier to catch and trace perpetrators.

Similarly, by working with industry we were able to secure family-friendly filters; the default-on option means that people who log on must actively disable the filters that prevent harmful content from reaching, for example, young people. We have also worked with industry on an important and generously funded campaign, “Internet Matters”. The previous Labour Government set up the UK Council for Child Internet safety, which brings together 200 stakeholders who work on these issues. It has an important effect on driving forward policy. We continue to make progress on matters such as increasing police capability, the creation of the first Minister for Internet Safety and Security—my colleague Baroness Joanna Shields—and, with the Digital Economy Bill, the introduction of legislation to secure age verification for adult content.

As I have said, four clear issues that the Government should take forward emerged from the debate. First, although there was welcome praise for the Essex and Durham constabularies, there was an absolute recognition of the need to skill up the police force. We have the

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre and different arrangements in the national police service, but for cybercrime in general—it is often financial crime—and this kind of crime in particular, it should be possible to create specialist units with national capability.

The police should also think very hard about the people they recruit. There is no need for them to recruit only for conventional police training—people who can walk the beat or perform the traditional roles of policing; there is every opportunity to recruit people with specialist skills that may not be transferable to the rest of the police service but who could be recruited relatively quickly to do this work.

There was a clear call from the House for legislative clarity, both clarity in defining online abuse and clarity about the myriad different Acts and statutes that come to bear in this area. The new Government under the new Prime Minister will want to make clarifying and consolidating that legislation a priority. That was a clear call from the House that must be taken forward.

The issue of anonymity was raised, with the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (John Nicolson) debating whether it should come under our consideration. I would not want to legislate to remove anonymity. Whether to allow anonymous users should be a matter for individual platforms, just as I would not require the Royal Mail to refuse to handle any letter that had been sent anonymously. That kind of interference would be unjustified,

That point leads me on to the role of platforms. It is interesting to consider that in the online world we now suddenly have companies that in many respects are bigger and more influential than many nation states—Facebook has a population of 1.2 billion, and Twitter has a population of 300 million—yet to a certain extent are left to their own devices to create their own rules, society and regulation, without the role of Government or of civic society as a whole being taken into account. Platforms must work with Governments and civic society to create rules. I support my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke in her call for something I have been keen to make progress on, namely a clear code of conduct within the UK that clarifies what constitutes online abuse, and, even more importantly for users, gives clarity on the rapid remedies available to people who are abused in this way. We have heard some really horrific examples, but of course we all know of those examples because we see them day in, day out, either on the news or because we ourselves or our friends are being attacked.

**Kit Malthouse:** Will the Minister address the specific point raised by a number of Members about whether there should be legislation to place specific duties—in particular, a duty on child protection—on some of the very large companies that he mentioned? There was a general theme in contributions from across the House that we would either like existing legislation to be consolidated in one Bill that we could then look at in the round or we would like measures on this issue to be brought forward in the Digital Economy Bill. Is any of that likely to happen?

**Mr Vaizey:** I should have said earlier that the views of my hon. Friend need to be taken very seriously. He has very serious experience from his time as deputy mayor for policing in London. I listen to him very seriously

indeed. How can I put this? I want to get the Digital Economy Bill through the House. It has a specific focus, so I would be cautious about inviting him or any other Member to load additional responsibilities on to it, particularly on issues that need careful thought and planning. But I would certainly welcome discussions with him and would never rule out appropriate regulation to push the responsibility for some of the appalling abuse that we see day in, day out on to social media. It is not enough—this also applies to issues such as intellectual property and the online theft of music and film—to view platforms as passive vehicles. They are extremely wealthy companies that rely on a large number of users to generate the advertising that creates their shareholders' wealth. There needs to be partnership, and I do not rule out regulation.

Having said that, given a post-Brexit situation in which we are keen to encourage inward investment, I do not want to frighten the horses of companies that provide a great deal of direct and indirect employment in the UK. We need to work with the companies, and we need clear guidelines on, and definitions of, online abuse. Even more importantly, we need very quick reactions, so that all of us as constituency MPs do not have to sit in surgeries with people who are clearly utterly distressed because of online material—their lives are sometimes in absolute pieces—and cannot get any adequate response from the platform hosting it.

This has been an extremely helpful and useful debate, and I look forward to moving seamlessly into the next debate, which I am also responding to.

2.35 pm

**Mrs Miller:** I thank Members for supporting this debate with such superb contributions. I also thank the Minister, who has sat in his place listening throughout.

The debate has demonstrated the strength of feeling that he has seen among Members across the House.

The UK led the way in tackling some of the early challenges online, working with European and US partners to put in place a global approach to outlawing child abuse images. We also passed some of the first legislation in the world to make it a crime to post revenge pornography. But we are now at real risk of falling behind. It is clear from the debate that there is universal condemnation of online abuse, so why have we not seen this Government present laws in Parliament to update our position?

There is cross-party support for specific laws to tackle online abuse and to consider specific duties on the police, schools, social network platforms, search engines and internet providers—duties that will show zero tolerance to online abuse. I must wholeheartedly disagree with my very great friend the Minister on anonymity. We have to lift the veil of anonymity in this country to make sure that people are responsible for what they say. We do it in every other part of our lives, so why not online?

The Minister is fortunate that the Digital Economy Bill has already been introduced to the House; it is a means of making the sort of changes that have been called for by Members of all parties here today. Those changes need to be part of a coherent cross-Government strategy. He should take Members' concerns back to his Department and call for action now.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the increasing number of cases where the internet, social media and mobile phone technology are used to bully, harass, intimidate and humiliate individuals including children and vulnerable adults; calls on the Government to ensure that clear legislation is in place that recognises the true impact and nature of online abuse, as distinct to offline abuse; and further calls on the Government to put in place appropriate legal and criminal sanctions, police training, guidance to the CPS and education for young people relating to such abuse.

## Creative Industries

2.37 pm

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered support for the UK's creative industries and their contribution to the economy.

It is a pleasure to begin this debate. I applied to the Backbench Business Committee with the hon. Members for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) and for Dundee West (Chris Law) because this House needs to recognise the vital role the creative industries play in our culture and economy. The issue has not been debated in this Chamber for some considerable time, and I thank hon. Members from all parts of the House who supported the application.

I also put on record that I am on the steering committee for Sunderland 2021, our bid to be the 2021 capital of culture. Although the role is unpaid, I feel I should note it, as I will be referring to Sunderland 2021's work in our bid to become the UK city of culture.

The UK is a world hub for the creative industries. They showcase the best of our country. They are outward looking, innovative and successful. Their achievements can be seen throughout the length and breadth of our country, and I am sure hon. Members from all parts of the House will speak about the wonderful creative elements of the constituencies they represent, just as I will discuss the vast creativity in Sunderland Central.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): The hon. Lady has started in a very positive fashion, which I much appreciate. I used to be the chief executive of a film and video production company that had a rule that 40% of our income must come from overseas. Has she thought about the contribution of the creative industries to this country's exports?

**Julie Elliott:** Absolutely. The creative industries are almost a hidden gem because they are so good at creating wealth and turnover, exports and imports, but they are not as glamorous as the manufacturing industries. I entirely accept the hon. Gentleman's point.

The creative industries comprise many sub-sectors—advertising, architecture, arts, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, television, research and development, software, toys, games, radio and video games, and the list goes on. Part of the reason why the creative industries are hidden is that the range is so vast. I sincerely hope that today the House will pay tribute to the essential role that they all play in helping to drive innovation and growth. We are world leaders in these fields and there are many, many success stories. The BBC, as recent debates in this Chamber and elsewhere have shown, is envied and renowned around the world, creating a staggering £8 billion of economic value for our country. Every £1 spent on the BBC through the licence fee produces £2 worth of value through employment, economic opportunities and expenditure.

The fashion sector is the largest employer among the creative industries, supporting almost 800,000 jobs. In 2014 the direct value of the UK fashion industry to our economy was estimated to be £26 billion. Many of our authors are facing economic uncertainty, but they are

among the most talented in the world, providing engaging scripts for TV, film and theatre, producing literary gems and submitting content for interactive products and services. Our authors play a key role in the UK being a nation of readers.

Just this week the Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced that the UK's creative sector is booming. Jobs in the creative industries have increased three times faster than the UK average in other sectors. It is estimated that those industries generate almost £10 million an hour for the UK economy, totalling an incredible £84 billion a year. The figures are staggering.

In 2015 there were 1.9 million jobs in the creative industries, up 19.5% since 2011, accounting for one in 11 of all jobs in the UK. More than 60% of the jobs in and around the creative sector are skilled to degree level or above. It is therefore extremely concerning that the University of Sunderland in my constituency has reported that there has been a reduction in the number of applications that it has received from students wishing to study arts, culture and creative subjects. Last month Ofqual announced that entries for GCSEs in arts subjects have fallen by 46,000 this year, compared with 2015.

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Before coming to this place, I worked in the creative industries for almost 20 years. As a graduate in economics, may I gently point out that it is not only those who have studied pure arts subjects who can contribute to the creative industries, which form one of the greatest exports this country has?

**Julie Elliott:** I totally accept that point. The figures that I have quoted on the value of the creative industries to the economy show their importance. We certainly need people with other skills, including economists, to be part of that. However, it is a worrying sign that applications for creative subjects have gone down. I hope the Government will act to promote creative subjects at GCSE, A-level and BTEC, and champion the many universities that offer thriving creative programmes.

I want to focus on the brilliant creativity and culture in Sunderland Central, the constituency that I live in and represent. Sunderland has been a centre for culture and higher learning since the 7th century. Benedict Biscop built St Peter's church and monastery in 674 AD on the site that is now occupied by Sunderland University's riverside campus. Among the earliest students at the monastery was the renowned author and scholar, the Venerable Bede. Sunderland's proud history in glassmaking and glass art dates back to this period, when the first stained glass ever made in England was created for St Peter's church by craftsmen who had come to Sunderland from France. The National Glass Centre, which has undergone a £2.5 million redesign, is located in my constituency and tells the story of our city's glass production heritage and attracts more than 200,000 visitors every year. As well as teaching and research in glass and ceramics, the centre continues to manufacture glass.

As I mentioned earlier, in order for the creative industries to continue to thrive, we need to ensure that creative subjects are not side-lined in our schools, and that our universities continue to aid students' creative development. I am proud that in my home city we have a fantastic institution for higher education at the University

of Sunderland, which specialises in courses that equip graduates with the skills that the creative sector needs. Over the past 10 years the university has invested in cultural and creative education, including the Northern Centre of Photography, the David Puttnam media centre, Spark FM, the Priestman fine art and form studios, and the mediaHUB.

This year construction has begun on a new centre for enterprise and innovation at the university's city campus. This hub, which will become home to the north-east's first FabLab, will support businesses in Sunderland and the wider region, allowing companies the space that they need and providing them with access to a higher level of professional and academic expertise. No doubt the new centre will build on the university's strong track record in support for innovation in my city.

It is fair to say that the creative industries are growing in our country, in large part due to the digital economy. In Sunderland we used to be renowned for our coalmining and shipbuilding industries. Now, Sunderland is leading the way in the north-east, with a thriving software sector comprising 150 firms in the city, with a vision for future expansion. The major success story has been Sunderland Software City, an ambitious partnership between the public and private sectors and the university. Its aim is to support innovation and growth in the north-east software industry. Since it was established in 2009 it has assisted over 300 software businesses and helped 150 start-ups. It has sought to attract investment and skilled workers to our region. Now more than 32,000 people are employed in the north-east's IT sector, and global tech companies have established permanent bases in Sunderland, providing high-skilled, quality jobs and promising career paths for our young people.

As I said earlier, I am a member of the Sunderland 2021 steering group—a group of stakeholders from culture, education, business, media, health and economic regeneration, working to steer the strategic direction of the bid and help to build a compelling vision for the development of culture in Sunderland over the next decade. Our city's bid to become the city of culture in 2021 showcases the very best of Sunderland, particularly its creativity. It is a shining light on our vibrant home-grown music scene. Sunderland-based bands, such as Field Music, the Lake Poets, Lilliput, Hyde & Beast, the Futureheads and Frankie and the Heartstrings, have generated almost £1 million-worth of worldwide record sales. The bid also has the support of our famous sons and daughters, such as Dave Stewart, previously of the Eurythmics, and Lauren Laverne.

Sunderland has wonderful venues for musicians in which many talented artists have performed. I pay tribute to the tireless work of those who sustain live music venues in Sunderland, and to the Stadium of Light, usually home to Sunderland football club. In the summer it has been hosting concerts from some of the biggest names in world music since 2009. Last week Beyoncé kicked off the UK leg of her tour at the Stadium of Light. The stadium is built on the site of the last big coal mine in the city.

I pay tribute, too, to the fantastic work of Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust, better known as the MAC Trust, which has been a driving force for the many wonderful things happening in arts and regeneration at the heart of the Sunderland 2021 bid. Since 2012, the trust has sought to implement ambitious plans that are

now coming to fruition, with a vision for Sunderland's future as a vibrant, creative, exciting place where the arts, music and culture flourish. The trust is establishing a cultural quarter in the heart of our city by converting some of Sunderland's historic buildings into cultural hubs. The trust is also behind the cultural spring project, working with the university and the Customs House Trust to transform the way in which the people of my constituency and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) view, experience and make art.

I am immensely proud of the work that is going on in Sunderland and I am delighted that I have had the chance to showcase the wonderful role that creative industries play in our local culture and economy, and the importance of this sector to the national economy. This debate will also give other Members the opportunity to show the immense breadth and diversity in this sector, which all too often is not talked about, in terms of the economic benefit we can get from the industries.

2.51 pm

**Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) and to have listened to her remarks. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to secure this debate, which we have called to highlight the significant contribution the creative industries make to the UK and to stress the importance of its continued support whether through investment, financial measures or general wider awareness.

The hon. Lady mentioned various lists in her speech. Creative industries cover a number of iconic and diverse national treasures including the Tate, Pinewood Studios, the British Library, Adele—my favourite, rather than Beyoncé—and the BBC. It is also important to consider the wider economic benefits. The creative industries contributed £84.1 billion to the UK economy in 2014, equivalent to £9.6 million every hour, with an annual growth rate of nearly 10%.

This debate offers us an opportunity to celebrate our creative industries and consider how best to make sure the sector's potential is realised. It is clear that the creative industries are flourishing and are playing an ever-increasing role in our economy, with growth outstripping that of the finance and insurance sectors and employment up by 5%, significantly higher than the 2.1% UK average. With this in mind as well as Nesta's estimation that 35% of all occupations will become automated in the next two decades, a highly skilled and creative workforce, where human ingenuity cannot be replaced by robotics, will become even more important. It is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to congratulate the Minister on being the longest serving arts Minister in our nation's great history.

Recent figures show that the number of jobs in the creative industries increased by 3.2%, which is about 1.9 million jobs. The increase since 2011 has been nearly 20%. These headline statistics are important, but we must also nurture skills and the flow of talent into the sector. It is therefore vital that we continue to encourage and inspire our young people to become more involved in, and aware of, the sector. In this context, I commend the Government on introducing coding to the curriculum in 2014.

[Chris White]

We must continue to allow and help businesses to hire skilled individuals, and to do so from a strong UK base of talent. It follows that, with such a high growth rate for the creative industries, we must not allow a skills gap to develop in this sector. From primary school level through to our colleges and universities, I urge us to nurture creative talent, to allow the UK to become internationally renowned as the place to do business in the creative sphere.

In my constituency, Warwickshire College sets a strong example, offering a wide range of courses in related subject areas to ensure that students are able to develop skills, and this approach should be taken up more widely. The United Nations defines the UK's creative industries sector as being at the crossroads between the arts, business and technology. We are at the forefront of the sector internationally and I suggest that our global ranking of 1st in terms of soft power is largely due to the rich culture and cultural sector of our country. Joseph Nye, originator of the concept, highlighted three pillars that contribute to a nation's soft power, one of which is culture. Our creative industries underpin this success.

As co-chair of the all-party group on video games, it would be remiss of me not to mention that sector and its huge contribution to our economy. I am pleased to see my fellow co-chair, the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), in his place, and I look forward to hearing his remarks.

The industry employs 24,000 people across 12 clusters in the UK, with a significant number of games companies based in my constituency. The UK games industry blends the best of British technology, creating games that are exported around the world. With the global market expected to expand by 8% annually over the next five years, we cannot ignore it.

An important point to put on record is the need for the video games sector to be seen in the context of contributing to our cultural make-up, and I believe it is right that it is put on the same footing as film and television in terms of investment and the way it is perceived for its cultural contribution to our society. Parliament can and must do more to champion games as a mainstream creative tech industry right across the UK, and funding should equitably recognise the sector as such.

Warwick and Leamington is home to 40 companies providing 1,200 jobs, and has acquired the nickname of "silicon spa", which I am beginning to feel is unfortunate. Video games tax credits have been a major boost for the business both locally and nationally and I encourage the Government, after the good work they have done on tax credits, to make sure the industry is far more aware of the advantage this will give. We need to push for greater awareness of games developers' access to tax credits. Some 237 games were approved for tax relief in 2015, and that number must surely increase to help other companies working hard in this industry.

We must also continue to invest in the arts, following on from a long tradition of doing so and maintaining world-class museums and galleries. The UK now invests, unfortunately, a smaller percentage of its GDP in arts and culture than the EU average and less than competitors such as France and Germany. This is something we should talk about in the coming months.

The arts foster an environment in which ideas are cultivated, and our tourism trade, which is such a prominent feature of our economy, benefits enormously. London theatres generated nearly £100 million in VAT receipts in 2013, which was a record. Furthermore, spend on Arts Council England represents 0.1% of total public spend in England, yet arts and culture contribute 0.4% of UK gross value added. Public investment yields excellent returns, and I hope that the Minister will indicate the Government's intention to look more closely at increasing such investment. With more investment comes greater diversity and increased opportunities for ideas to become commercial success stories. The exponential growth of creative industries also needs to be recognised in Whitehall, especially by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which fails to note the sector as part of its industrial growth data.

This ties into my contribution to the most recent Queen's Speech debate, in which I called for the implementation of an industrial strategy. As part of that cohesive and concise document, which I envisage to be a rolling progress report from the Cabinet Office, the Government should outline their promotion and support across the creative and cultural sectors. The Government's export target of £1 trillion annually by 2020 is very welcome, but we must allow industries with such significant growth potential to flourish. Industry leaders have put forward proposals that could add £31 billion by 2020 to our exports.

Turning briefly to the digital economy, I note the Digital Economy Bill introduced to the House on Tuesday. The drive to rapidly improve our infrastructure will have very positive impacts on our ability to innovate, to create and to improve productivity. Digital technology is embedded in much of what we do, and I support the Government in providing our wealth creators with the ability to produce world-class products. The digital economy strategy produced by Innovate UK seeks to take inspiration from the creative industries, which have been at the forefront of innovation in many aspects of life. Of course, confidence to invest is key, not least in industries that require long-term decision making, so I urge that the creative industries be a major consideration as we enter negotiations with the EU.

In sum, I am pleased that we have the opportunity today to raise the profile of our creative industries. The statistics speak for themselves in the tremendous contribution the sector makes to our economy, and I call on the Government to support and recognise this and to allow the potential of the creative industries to be realised. The UK can, and should, be seen as a creative powerhouse.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. If everyone sticks to nine minutes, everyone will get an equal amount of time.

3.1 pm

**Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab):** In his autumn statement, the Chancellor said:

"Britain is not just brilliant at science; it is brilliant at culture too. One of the best investments we can make as a nation is in our extraordinary arts, museums, heritage, media and sport."<sup>7</sup>—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1368.]

If we do not also invest in education that prepares children to play roles in those industries, we will slide backwards. Many of the people in this debate participated in the Westminster Hall debate earlier this week about the impact of the EBacc on education, theatre, art, drama, music and other expressive arts. Our concern during that debate was that there is a direct relationship between the introduction of a mandatory EBacc in a limited number of subjects including none of the aforementioned, and the reduction in the number of students taking GCSEs, A-levels and other examinations in those creative subjects.

The Minister for Schools, in arguing that there had been no such decline, relied on figures that were at least a year old to sustain his argument. He said:

“My assertion is that there will be no significant fall in the arts subjects as a consequence of the EBacc figure of 90%.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2016; Vol. 612, c. 215WH.]

I have seen evidence that such a fall is already occurring. If our figures are correct and if there continues to be a decline, I want the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy to meet his colleagues in the Department for Education and persuade them of what I am certain is the unintended consequence of the EBacc proposal. Ministers say that we need the EBacc to get us to the same level as Iceland, Ontario and many countries which frankly are nowhere near ours when it comes to the performance of their creative industries. Will he agree to meet the Minister for Schools and ask him, if the decline continues, to include at least one of these expressive subjects—students should be able to choose which—within the suite of mandatory GCSE subjects? If we do not do that, we will slide backwards. There is no doubt that our brilliant creative industries depend enormously on children having experience of drama, dance, art, and music in school, and on the creativity that has traditionally been part of UK education.

A number of things that are now part of the creative industries were not invented when I was at school: video games, beatbox, Twitter—those things simply did not exist. Indeed, email did not exist. We must ensure that young people get experience at school of the creativity that is possible, and of the disciplines and craft that lie at the heart of many of our creative industries. Earlier, the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) said that it is not necessary to study those subjects professionally to be creative, which is absolutely true. However, it is necessary to have experience of them, and I am concerned about the number of children—specifically those in the least privileged communities—who are losing contact with those experiences.

There are wonderful opportunities. Earlier this week I was at the National Theatre watching the Connections youth drama festival. It showed outstanding work done by young people in theatre groups around Britain. However, many young people have never had the opportunity to participate in a live performance of music or theatre, and many have not experienced or learned from someone who is employed in a creative industry.

When the Minister responds to the debate, will he commit to discussing with the Department for Education whether my prediction about what is happening to expressive arts subjects in our schools is correct? Will he speak directly to Ministers about ways to end that decline, and will he ensure an opportunity in our schools

for children to experience live theatre, and for every child to visit a museum and hear directly from someone who is employed in a creative industry and who makes their living through creating things?

As a previous primary school teacher, I know that children are creative. Play is children creating things, but often that creativity is driven out by the way we teach them. Instead of driving out their creativity, we must give children the skills that allow their innate creativity to be developed. That means not just investing in education, but for the Minister to expect all arts organisations to take their responsibility to young people seriously. I am not saying that arts organisations do not do that—I have just cited an example of one of our premier arts institutions that does exactly that. A few days ago I went to the Barbican, and children were part of the performance of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's last opera. There are lots of good things to be proud of, but every child should have an opportunity to engage with some of our great creative institutions and learn from them, so that in future our creative industries can make the most of that talent.

I refer the Minister to Dickens's “Hard Times”. Sissy Jupe, who knew everything there was to know about horses because she worked in a circus and her dad ran it, was unable in a single sentence to define a horse because it was such an exciting animal, whereas Bitzer, pupil No. 6, came up with the right answer: “Quadruped. Graminivorous,” he said. That is what we are heading for in our system. We reward the Bitzers of this world and do not nurture Sissy Jupe's understanding. I know the Minister would like to do that. He could interact with the Department for Education to change its Gradgrind approach and ensure that every child in Britain has a chance to learn how best to use their creativity.

3.10 pm

**Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for the debate and the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) for pushing for it. It is crucial to have time in the House to discuss the creative industries and their contribution to the economy. It is a broad topic, and rightly so given the immense variety of roles within the creative industries. As chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on music, I will focus my brief remarks on that sector. I fear I might be spoiling the Minister, who has had to listen to me talk about this subject twice in two days. I am sure he can cope; he has held the brief for a long time.

I should like to highlight statistics from the recently released reports from UK Music, the representative body that does such a great job in supporting parliamentarians and in other work within the industry. The reports demonstrate how vibrant and productive the music scene is in the UK today. The “Measuring Music 2015” report showed that the music industry contributed £4.1 billion to the UK economy in 2014, and that it involves 117,000 full-time jobs. A huge number of those jobs are creative: musicians, composers, songwriters and lyricists alone accounted for £1.9 billion.

Not only is music vital to our economy in the UK; it is also our face to the outside world. The report found that music exports accounted for £2.1 billion in annual revenue, which is more than half the industry's gross

[Nigel Adams]

value added, as compared with about 30% in the economy as a whole. One in seven of all global album sales were for British artists, and five of the top 10 selling albums in 2014 were by British artists—that is before artists including Adele delivered another blockbuster year in 2015.

The “Wish You Were Here 2015” report reinforced that message. Direct and indirect spend from music tourism in 2014 was some £3.7 billion. Many right hon. and hon. Members will enjoy festivals around the country this summer—I have already seen the Secretary of State at a festival. I am disappointed he is not here, but he may very well be at a festival somewhere in the UK, and I am sure the Minister will do a fantastic job in replying. That £3.7 billion is a 7% increase on the previous year. Some 38% of our live music audience were music tourists who came here seeking out their favourite British artists. They spend an average of £852 in the UK, all of which sustains more than 39,000 full-time jobs in Britain.

UK Music is undertaking a census of the live music scene in key UK cities, which has never been done before, so that policy makers, planners, local authorities and others for the first time have access to the data they need to assess the impact of decisions on the music industry in their areas. The first report is the Bristol census—I note that the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) is in her place—which showed that, in that city alone, live music generated £123 million of revenue in 2014. I look forward to more reporting so that we have the knowledge rather than just the desire to do right by our music scene and those who work in it.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Scottish Affairs Committee’s report on the creative industries in Scotland, published in February, recommends that the UK Government work with representatives of the creative industries in Scotland to assess how creative tax reliefs could be adapted so as to be of greater benefit to Scotland. That could include variable rates of tax relief for different parts of the UK, creating a tax relief for the music industry and piloting a tax relief for small and medium-sized enterprises working in the creative sector. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in calling on the UK Government to disclose what measures have been taken in this area so far?

**Nigel Adams:** That is a reasonable thing to ask. Unfortunately, the Minister is not in his place, but I shall remind him. Perhaps the hon. Lady could intervene on him later. It is absolutely right we do whatever we can, right across the UK, to ensure creative industries are given all the tools necessary to continue to grow this part of our economy.

When we speak of the contribution to the economy, we must remember that the economy is not just some vague term. The economy means people’s jobs and their ability to make a living. Yesterday, I held a Westminster Hall debate on the subject of remuneration for artists for online play and streaming. It is important to state that this is not just an issue for the big well-known names. This is an issue for songwriters, producers and others who put work into a song. They rely on the revenue that comes from plays far more than someone

who has a profile. I was pleased that colleagues from my own party, the Labour party, the Scottish National party and the Democratic Unionist party all came to take part in a productive discussion about what remains a relatively new policy area, over which we will soon have significantly more power as the UK exits the EU.

Recently, I spoke with one songwriter who had seen the princely sum of less than £6 in revenue from some 3.2 million plays of his song on YouTube. It is therefore not hard to imagine the despair of someone who sees their life’s work available for free on the internet, with little or no prospect of financial reward.

At this point, I want to commend BBC radio, which has done so much not only to give new artists exposure but to ensure they are paid for airplay. The BBC takes risks on new artists, providing exposure for the music of new and emerging artists before release, helping them to drive record sales and build their profile. The BBC also plays a vital role in the development and promotion of UK music both culturally and economically. What it does for unsigned acts, with its “Introducing” initiative, is amazingly successful. It is not just Radio 1; Radio 2 hosts an unrivalled range of specialist programming, helping audiences to discover new music and helping to break new British artists in specialist genres. A bit more of this spirit of nurturing creative talent across the industry as a priority would be welcome.

The British Phonographic Industry reports that in 2015 there was more revenue raised from the 2.1 million vinyl LP sales by British artists than the 27 billion music video streams on YouTube and similar platforms. This discussion is not about shutting down technologies; it is about striking the right balance. To me, it is clear we have not yet done so. As the well-known manager, Brian Message, said:

“The advent of the digital era introduced an opportunity for those involved in the music business to pull together for the economic benefit of all stakeholders. To our collective detriment, this did not come to pass.”

I would welcome all contributions from colleagues to ongoing discussions in the all-party group on where the right balance will lie and to pick up more of the themes we discussed yesterday morning in Westminster Hall. We need additional support, in particular from local authorities, to ensure we have the infrastructure to produce great music here in the UK. There is an issue around business rates being levied on festivals, sometimes retrospectively. That could have a huge detrimental impact on the festival industry right across the country.

The studios that can accommodate the orchestras needed to record film soundtracks are very rare. I believe we have only two here in London. I am sure the Minister will correct me if that is not accurate. That is minimum capacity; such must often be booked on short notice. If we lose that capability, that kind of recording will be taken elsewhere, and the work will not be available for British musicians.

Finally, we must remember that to make successful financially viable careers and to be ambassadors for Britain and bring fans here as our tourists, our artists need the ability to be successful abroad, particularly in the States. To be globally successful, they really need to break the American market, but the current visa system for UK musicians wishing to perform there is complex to the point of being unworkable. It costs hundreds of thousands or thousands of pounds and requires expensive

overnight visits for interviews with officials. The equivalent system for foreign musicians to come here and perform in the UK entails only a small fraction of the cost.

I know Ministers have heard from me before on this subject, but I reiterate the point that support does not always mean Government spending. In this area, musicians could really use the support of colleagues right across the House, but particularly of those on the Government Front Bench in the Foreign Office as well as in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, to try to simplify this process. A small but vitally few helpful steps in the first instance would involve convincing the US immigration service to establish a dedicated liaison team for the music industry which could provide relevant advice and answers for artists, provide timed appointments for visas so that artists could avoid expensive overnight stays in London or Belfast, and clarify the position on ESTA waivers and communicate it clearly to all border forces to avoid inconsistent application.

Our creative industries are making huge contributions. I am pleased with the work our all-party group has done on identifying where support is most needed thus far. I would now warmly welcome the engagement of all colleagues and Ministers to help put that into practice so that our music industry can continue to inspire the creativity of our young people, the interest of our music fans and the imagination of the world.

3.21 pm

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): Frankly, in any discussion of the creative industries, it is essential to begin by reminding ourselves of the deep complexity and real significance of the activities that this topic covers. Yes, the creative industries include large enterprises in areas such as film-making, computer games, fashion and publishing, and they have many thousands of employees and trade globally. And yes, the creative industries involve countless numbers of individuals and groups who are active in fields such as art, music, dance, poetry and many other things. In addition, however, there are those who support the creative industries through their contribution as teachers, curators of galleries, event organisers and other support roles. All of that adds up to the colourful, diverse and beautiful tapestry that makes our lives so enriched. I am sure that everyone in the House is wholly thankful for the wonderful contribution that those people make to our lives.

It has been estimated that the creative industries employ 1.9 million people in the UK as a whole, and 174,000 of those are in Scotland. Believe it or not, the creative industries are worth more than £9 million pounds an hour to the UK economy and this is the fastest growing sector in the UK. Yet it is not sufficient for us as legislators and policy makers to view the creative industries purely in economic terms. The key message is that the health and vitality of the creative industries should be an issue that is of crucial significance to this House.

Where better, of course, to reflect upon this than in my own constituency of Dundee—quelle surprise!—which has a long and distinguished history in leading the creative industries. Within the University of Dundee, for example, Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, first established in the 19th century, is now one of the leading art schools in the UK. This creative hub is now the centre of a thriving network of studios,

artists, designers and architects and has been instrumental in supporting the development of the Dundee Contemporary Arts centre, which opened at the end of the last millennium.

As part of the current £1 billion regeneration of our waterfront, Dundee was chosen, out of all other cities in the UK, to build the new Victoria and Albert design museum, which will be completed in two years' time. I would welcome all Members visiting us. The Dundee repertory theatre is home to both Scotland's only full-time company of actors and the Scottish dance theatre. Dundee is also well known as the home of many iconic and best-selling children's comics, such as *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, the *Judy* and the *Jackie*, which is now a west end musical. I recommend all Members to see it at their earliest opportunity. If they visit Dundee today, they will find an iconic trail of 55 sculptures of one of our famous comic characters—Oor Wullie. After all, he is Oor Wullie, Your Wullie and A'body's Wullie!

In 2014, Dundee was the first UK city to win the UNESCO City of Design award.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend has name-checked a number of important characters and creations emanating from Dundee, including Oor Wullie, but I think he forgot to mention The Broons.

**Chris Law:** I must apologise to the House. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Ma and Pa Broon would be disgusted with me for forgetting to mention them. "The Broons Annual" is a fantastic Christmas present.

Believe it or not, in addition to all that, there is more. With the assistance of investment and facilities at Abertay University, Dundee's creative tradition has found a new outlet. The city is now an internationally renowned centre for video game development, and the birthplace of some of the biggest names in game history. Abertay offered the first computer games degree in the world, in 1997. That bold move was subsequently copied by higher education institutions around the world, and helped to cement Dundee's reputation as a centre of excellence for video games.

Let me give a few examples. In the 1990s, the Dundee company DMA Design created the game "Lemmings", which sold over 50 million copies on multiple formats. It also developed "Grand Theft Auto", which today is the biggest selling game in the world. I urge you to get your hands on a copy as soon as possible, Mr Deputy Speaker. Most recently, Chris Van Der Kuyl's 4J Studios developed the global gaming sensation "Minecraft". There are now more than 100 video games companies based in Dundee, and I am pleased to say that the number is growing rapidly.

As we heard earlier from the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White)—he and I co-chair the all-party parliamentary group on video games—the video games industry is vital to the UK economy. As a whole, games companies generate high-quality, high-productivity jobs. The UK boasts the highest number of mobile games jobs in the EU, with 5,000 full-time employees, and 64% of all registered games companies in the UK have been incorporated in the last five years alone.

These are just some of the examples of industries and businesses that give Dundee its creative pulse, and are reflected in many other areas of Scotland and the rest

[Chris Law]

of the UK. So how do we support these activities that are so important both to our individual wellbeing and to economic prosperity? Artists, designers, musicians and games programmers are not merely creative individuals; they also need to be entrepreneurs. Like other small businesses and start-ups, they need advice, information, and access to funding and financial support.

In Scotland, we have a more culturally ambitious Government than ever before. Set up by the Scottish Government, Creative Scotland promotes enjoyment of the arts, and helps to identify and develop talent. It also chairs Scotland's Creative Industries Partnership, in which public agencies work together to share intelligence and research on the creative industries, co-ordinate opportunities, and clarify and signpost agency support. However, only some aspects of creative industries are devolved to Scotland.

In January this year, the Scottish Affairs Committee, on which I have the privilege to serve along with two of my colleagues who are present—very fine colleagues indeed—published a report on the creative industries in Scotland. It identified three key issues: tax incentives, broadcasting, and links with the EU.

A number of tax reliefs are available to the creative industries. There are film, animation, television, video games and theatre reliefs. They allow qualifying companies to claim a deduction when calculating their taxable profits, and they are very valuable to the creative industries as a whole. However, we found that they had been of limited use to the creative industries in Scotland, partly owing to the smaller scale of most creative enterprises in Scotland and partly because tax reliefs do not incentivise the locating of production outside existing industry hubs, which are predominantly London-based.

Our report made a number of specific recommendations for enhancing the responsiveness of tax relief regulations to the specific needs of the creative industries in Scotland. I urge the Minister, and his colleagues in the Treasury, to treat this as a matter of the utmost priority, and to consider the possibility that the most effective means of resolving these issues would be to devolve responsibility for tax reliefs for creative industries to the Scottish Government.

Public service broadcasting, in the form of the activities of the BBC, represents a crucial driver of the creative industries in Scotland, as well as representing a central pillar of our cultural life. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the output of BBC Scotland. There is also a striking economic imbalance, with licence-fee income of over £320 million generated in Scotland, but a BBC Scotland budget of less than £200 million.

The BBC has been slow to respond to these issues and has been less than transparent in its decision-making process around them. Within the past few days, a report from the inquiry "A Future for Public Service Television", chaired by Lord David Puttnam, has been published. It recommends that the only effective solution to the growing mismatch between the needs and aspirations of the Scottish people in respect of public service broadcasting and their increasing frustration with the BBC is to devolve an appropriate proportion of the overall BBC budget to Scotland, and allow BBC Scotland to commission programmes and design schedules as it sees fit. While acknowledging the independence of the BBC from

Government, I urge the Minister to express clear and unequivocal support for this proposal, which has the potential to allow Scotland to develop as a hub for high-quality television and film output and contribute to an expansion of employment in this field. I share Lord Puttnam's view that little in the BBC reflects "the current constitutional settlement with Scotland."

The recent Scottish Affairs Committee report devoted little attention to the EU dimension of creative industries because, other than in areas of intellectual property, the individuals and organisations that we consulted were largely satisfied with the opportunities and benefits to the creative industries that flowed from EU membership. However, all this has changed due to the fear and uncertainty created by this Government in their misguided EU referendum. This is a troubling situation. Many aspects of the creative industries in Scotland are embedded in our broader cultural European tradition, which requires ongoing collaboration with colleagues in other countries. At the very least, this situation requires that the creative industries should have full and active representation in future negotiations with the EU, and that the particular needs of the creative industries in Scotland should be specifically championed through the presence of members of the Scottish Government.

Having talked briefly about the issues and challenges facing the creative industries in Scotland, I would like to sum up by making one final point. Scotland is undoubtedly an outward-looking, internationalist and progressive society—a "mongrel nation" where all Jock Tamson's bairns reside—yet it is also distinctive and different, and demands to be heard. However, cultural life, and the funding decisions that go with it, are still dominated by London, stifling Scotland's creative industries as a result. This is not a zero-sum game, however. Successful broadcasting, film-making, computer games and festivals in Scotland reach out to an international market, and do not diminish the significance of London and Manchester as global centres of creative endeavour. In this, we can all be winners.

3.32 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) on initiating this debate. My goodness, she has chosen an excellent time to do so, because creative industries throughout the United Kingdom are doing extremely well. Only three weeks ago, I was in Scotland, ostensibly going to Edinburgh and Balmoral, but because my sat-nav went wrong I practically toured the whole of Scotland, and it looked pretty good to me. I have a daughter who performed at the Edinburgh festival, so I am bit biased. It is wonderful. The creative industries in London are also doing extremely well.

Before going on to the main part of my speech about Southend-on-Sea being the alternative city of culture, I want to remind the House that the United Kingdom is a global leader in creative industries, which promote everything that is great about this country and generate £8.8 million an hour—absolutely amazing. The United Kingdom's success in this field is ranked at No. 2 in the 2016 Soft Power rankings and third in the 2015 Anholt-GfK Roper nation brands index, which records the value of the positive perceptions that consumers worldwide have of individual countries. May I say how good it is to see a star of MP4, the hon. Member for Perth and North

Pertshire (Pete Wishart), in the Chamber this afternoon? Members of Parliament really do have an interest in this subject.

Southend, of course, is no exception to the United Kingdom's success in the creative industries. The upcoming Southend alternative city of culture next year will exemplify the United Kingdom's strengths in media, music and the arts. It can already be seen that Southend has a consistent record of exhibiting new, forward-thinking arts and cultural projects. NetPark in Southend is the first digital art park in the world. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport visited the park at the beginning of the year. It was developed by a wonderful arts organisation called Metal and transformed empty or derelict spaces into vibrant cultural community hubs. It is a new visitor attraction for Southend and presented a collection of specially commissioned digital artworks and stories at Chalkwell park. All the works are experienced through a smart device, such as an iPad, an iPhone or an Android device. The inaugural collection has five artworks created by artists following an open-call selection process and five site-specific stories created by Southend school pupils working with writers and illustrators. In addition, the project includes an on-site digital education centre, the Metal Art School, equipped with both hardware and software, enabling ongoing R and D by artists and a range of digital creative learning in the curriculum.

Other projects by Metal in Southend include the Thames estuary biennial festival, the aim of which is to celebrate the outstanding cultural contribution of the 40-mile stretch of the iconic Thames estuary. Aren't we Members lucky to be here in this wonderful place, enjoying all that the beautiful River Thames can offer? Working with partners on both the north and south banks, the festival will occur biennially, with the first event due to take place in September this year. It will promote the planned new museum of the Thames estuary on the banks of the estuary in Southend, where—similar to Leicester—we found a Saxon buried beneath one of our parks.

Southend's contribution to the creative industries shows why the UK is an innovation-driven economy. We are renowned for breaking convention and being bold and daring in our creative industries. Yet we always do it with professionalism, style and swagger, and there are plenty of talented groups in Southend that display those qualities. The Southend Festival Chorus, the Eastwood Chorale, the Leigh Orpheus Male Voice Choir, of which I am a patron and which is the biggest male voice choir in the country, the South Essex Youth Symphony Orchestra, the Purple Goat Theatre group and the team behind the Southend Book and Arts fair provide just a snapshot of Southend's flourishing creative industries. The launch of the alternative city of culture happens in Southend this Sunday and somewhere in the House of Commons next week. What a good thing it is to be able to have such wonderful events in the Jubilee Room, showing off the creative talents of all parts of the United Kingdom.

Hull will be the city of culture next year and has arranged four main events in line with the seasons. Southend will have one specific theme each month, so it will be interesting to see how both parts of the country run their events. The monthly themes include music, the arts, fashion, media, culture, food, architecture, and

military events. Creative groups will play their part in how the wider world perceives the UK as a thriving cultural nation.

We have touched on the referendum a little bit—Scotland was not too happy with it—but I want us to be positive about the outcome. I hope that the House can be united in the belief that creative industries should not be daunted by the result. The UK's creative industries are still open for business, and there are many financial incentives to investing in the UK's creative sector, including tax reliefs that allow film productions to access a rebate of up to 25% of qualifying expenditure. Southend has high-end locations for films, such as the British gangster film "Essex Boys" and the James Bond film "Goldfinger", which featured the airport. Southend has also been used for popular music videos by artists including Oasis, Morrissey and George Michael. Long may Southend continue to be a location where great films, dramas and soap operas are shot—I would be happy to appear in any of them.

Even in the post-Brexit world in which we now find ourselves, creative industries will continue to thrive and take advantage of new opportunities to do business across the world. Those who are uncertain about the regulation of creative industries following our decision to leave the European Union should be reassured—the excellent Minister will do his best to reassure the House—by the potential for the UK's creative industries, especially those in Southend, to lead post-Brexit economic growth. I welcome the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport's comment that the success of the UK's creative industries

"is built upon the extraordinary talent which exists in this country, an amazing cultural heritage, the English language"—

Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish—

"and a tax system designed to support and encourage growth in the creative sector."

Given that this country is gifted with being creative and has a rich cultural heritage, we can have confidence that there can and will be a bright future for the UK's creative industries. The Southend alternative city of culture 2017 should be a benchmark for showing why it is so important for this Government and any Government to invest and provide the necessary incentives for creative industries to thrive and prosper.

3.40 pm

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) on leading this debate. She has, however, made me feel guilty, as she made such an excellent case for Sunderland's bid to be capital of culture 2021. Bristol also wants that title—I will have to put in for an Adjournment debate at some point.

Today, I want to focus on the impact leaving the EU could have on our creative industries and on what the Minister will do to deliver on his promise to give the arts a "voice in Brexit Britain". A Creative Industries Federation survey found that a staggering 96% of its members voted to stay in the EU, with 84% saying that EU membership was important to the future of their organisation. Before the vote, the prospect of leaving the EU was variously described as a "nightmare", "artistic isolation" and a "huge creative step backwards" by arts leaders. A joint letter from 250 actors, artists, musicians

[Kerry McCarthy]

and writers praising EU funding and collaboration in the run-up to the referendum was dismissed by the Brexit camp as the concerns of “luvvies”. I know that if the Minister was in his place—he will return—he would not dismiss the luvvies so lightly. I am sure he would agree that it is vital that issues such as access to markets, freedom of movement, intellectual property protection and EU funding for the creative sector are considered during the Brexit negotiations.

Before I go into detail, I want to namecheck Laura Snapes for an excellent article on Pitchfork.com, which has been the source for quite a bit of my material and quotes. On access to EU markets, the value of services exported by the UK creative industries in 2014 was nearly £20 billion, an increase of nearly 11% from the previous year. The EU is, at 56%, our largest export market for that sector. Currently, we can trade tariff-free and barrier-free across 28 countries; we have unrestricted access to 560 million potential customers. Before we entered the Common Market, there were tariffs: some form of import duty for us and export duty if we wanted to send products over to Europe. Let me give just one example. There has been a bit of a vinyl revival recently, and the majority of the vinyl we buy is made in plants in mainland Europe. The cost could now escalate, both at the point of manufacture and sale. Small and independent businesses have real concerns about this, because small margins make a huge difference to their survival.

I know people on the leave side have argued that leaving the EU would be a spur to developing better cultural and economic links with Commonwealth nations and emerging economies. But as Michael McClatchey, co-founder of Moshi Moshi Records, says:

“As a nation, switching our focus from trading with Europe to trading with Brazil, China, and India doesn’t really work for the music industry because we’re making very small inroads there, and I’m skeptical about how much we can enter these markets when they have such a different pop market and a strong historic music identity of their own”.

Copyright and intellectual property issues are incredibly important to the sector. There have been at least three European directives protecting the IP rights of artists and ensuring they receive remuneration for their work. Indeed, we discussed some of this in yesterday’s Westminster Hall debate. The EU’s copyright regime has been crucial in ensuring we have a creative industry at all. With the well-known fervour of Brexiteers for any opportunity to slash so-called red-tape, there are real worries that the life of artists will get worse without the copyright protections the EU provides.

I know that many in the industry have felt the EU is much more willing and able than the UK to take on the big technology companies, which have much less respect for copyright. Gregor Pryor, co-chair of Entertainment and Media Industry Group, says:

“I think some countries in Europe are perceived by rights holders as being more benevolent towards them. France is the best example because France holds intellectual property in such high regard, and from a legal perspective, tends to give broader rights to creators. I think it’s fair to say that the UK government hasn’t been as warm or receptive as some of the other governments in other European countries. I think the European Commission has been far more sympathetic to rights-holders than the UK government would be.”

Free movement is a massive concern. There is no doubt that free movement across mainland Europe has made touring easier and less expensive for British artists and musicians. Access to locations and mobility have also benefited our thriving film and TV industries. Musicians are really worried that Brexit could mean individual visas to enter each EU country, and the reintroduction of the carnet, a document detailing every single piece of equipment on deck to prevent the import or exports of products without paying VAT. We know that that would create a real barrier for musicians and other artists. The hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) mentioned the horrible difficulties that musicians encounter when they are touring the US—he has met a good friend of mine to discuss that matter. Some have to cancel gigs and even whole tours because visas are not processed in time, resulting in considerable financial losses.

Colin Roberts of Big Life Management says:

“Getting visas is an absolute minefield and it costs a lot of money, and it’s the reason that a lot of people don’t get to tour America...A large part of the PRS fund goes towards helping bands get to America. Are we going to be at a point where they’ll have to start a fund to get people into Europe?”

That is a good question. If it starts getting more difficult to export things that the UK is good at, what additional investment will be needed to help showcase British bands abroad in future? Roberts goes on to say that

“not only would our acts struggle—and it’s the small acts that would really struggle—but we would miss out on a hell of a lot of interesting artists that potentially wouldn’t be able to come to the UK either.”

Fabien Miclet is the co-ordinator of Liveurope, which is EU-funded and provides a music platform for new European talent, getting them support slots at bigger shows. He says:

“The UK is the beating heart of the European music scene—you can’t work on a European music project without the UK...Very often playing the UK is the step that allows small or young bands to get big.”

Will the UK still be part of programmes such as Liveurope if we leave the EU? Paul Reed, from the Association of Independent Festivals, warns that we could also see a reduction in music tourism, which in 2014 generated more than £3 billion for the UK economy.

Cross-border creative collaboration and the movement of talent across the EU are critical to the UK’s role as a creative hub. Many performers who are resident in the UK but nationals of other European countries are deeply concerned about their future here. Areas with especially high proportions of EU and international workers include dance—ballet and contemporary—opera, circus and the audio and music industry, which includes video games. Brexit could cause real problems for Sadler’s Wells and for our orchestras. I know that we debated that yesterday, but I reaffirm the need for real reassurance from the Government for EU nationals currently living and working in the creative sector that they should be allowed to remain here in the UK. Obviously, that works both ways, with many UK nationals working in the creative industries and arts in other EU countries. Will Brexit mean that they have to come home?

There is also considerable uncertainty in the sector about how the UK will compensate for loss of access to EU funding. I could go into quite a lot of detail on that, but I will give just one example. The Creative

Europe fund has supported 228 UK cultural and creative organisations and audio-visual companies and the cinema distribution of 84 UK films in other European countries with grants totalling €40 million. If the UK leaves the EU, does the Minister share the concern of many that, in all likelihood, this funding will no longer be available to the UK? Finally, many of us have been really upset about what the vote on 23 June says about Britain to the rest of Europe and the world. I hope that we can find a way through the next few years that shows that we have not pulled up the drawbridge. Let me again quote Fabien Miclet from Liveurope. He says:

“We try to encourage a positive feeling about Europe. Music, culture, traveling, discovering: that’s what makes us Europeans. People don’t really get enthusiastic about the common agricultural policy or the directive on car tyres. What people, especially the younger generations, need today is to share something simple and positive together. Live music can do this.”

Will the Minister say today which civil servant from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport will be appointed to the new EU unit co-ordinated by the Cabinet Office, when will he or she join negotiations and on which issues will they lead? Will he tell us what organisational arrangements DCMS is putting in place for Brexit negotiations and how many officials in the Department are working on preparations? What seems like a complete lack of post-Brexit contingency planning or, indeed, vision is causing considerable uncertainty, and I hope that the Minister today will give some much-needed reassurance.

I also hope that over the long term we will consider what role arts and culture can play in those parts of the UK, particularly highlighted by the referendum result, that do not feel listened to, do not feel part of the UK success story and are not benefiting from the growth of these high-skill sectors. Arts, culture and creativity can play a huge role in regeneration and are important to identity—just look at a cities such as Manchester, Liverpool or Bristol. This is about identity not just as a place, but as a person: feeling part of things, feeling proud of something and people feeling good about themselves as a result. So I hope that we can negotiate the Brexit minefield and emerge with an even more positive story to tell.

3.50 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the Members who secured the debate, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). As other Members have said, it has come at quite a timely moment, given the other debates that have taken place in Westminster Hall this week and the fact that a number of the industry bodies have been holding their annual receptions on the Terrace, in the function rooms or elsewhere.

On Monday, the Creative Industries Council held a reception in the Members’ Dining Room. Last night, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West and several other Members here today were in the National Liberal Club for the UK interactive entertainment reception—the National Liberal Club perhaps being slightly less interactive surroundings than the video games that were on display. Of course, as other Members have said, the festival season is well under way across the country.

I have a large number of personal and constituency interests that I will probably cover in my speech. I want to look at the vast scope of what we mean by the creative industries. I want to look particularly at how they play out in my constituency and the wider city of Glasgow and look at some of the policy challenges and opportunities, which have been covered in quite a bit of detail. By definition, creative industries are forever changing and renewing themselves and adapting and evolving. It is important to consider the impact of the traditional areas—music, art, writing and dance and so on—but as a number of Members have said, online and digital forums are growing in importance for accessing creativity and as a source of creativity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West has spoken about the huge importance of the computer gaming industry. The number of games companies operating in Scotland has increased by 600% in the past five years. Yesterday, at the UK reception, I was fascinated to learn more about the increasing importance of what some people call e-sports, which were just called computer games in my day. Essentially, the industry covers professional or competitive computer gaming.

In July, the Scottish exhibition and conference centre in Glasgow will welcome the Resonate festival, when thousands of people from across Scotland and, indeed, Europe and probably the world will come together to watch other people—leaders in their fields and really talented people who have invested an awful lot of time in this—demonstrating their skills in a whole range of different e-sports or interactive computer games. My hon. Friend mentioned “Lemmings”. Of course, we do not need to pay money to watch other people play the computer game, “Lemmings”, when we can watch a live action version taking place in front of us over there on the Labour Benches, but I recognise that this is supposed to be a consensual debate, so I will not go too far down that line.

E-sports are attracting more than 256 million unique viewers a year. By 2018, that figures is expected to overtake the number of people who watch the US national football league, which is the largest watched sport or entertainment in the world.

If I can be creative with the definition of creative industries, I want to make a pitch for Scotland’s No. 1 craft product—the water of life, *uisce beatha*—because the new and experimental distillers that we see coming on line, especially those who are producing gin, are involved in a unique and creative process. Glasgow has its own distiller company, and Makar gin is named after the Scots word for a creator or poet, so I thought that that was worth noting as well.

Glasgow is, as I mentioned in my maiden speech, the home and the focus of so many of these industries. Now, there is nothing in Glasgow quite on the scale of the Edinburgh international festival, but it has benefited over the years from a range of different designations. In that respect, I wish all the cities bidding for the title of city of culture the very best, because when Glasgow became the European capital of culture in 1990, it began something of a cultural renaissance, the benefits of which are still being felt today. The roots of that can be traced to the empire exhibition in 1938 and the garden festival in 1988, but we also went on to be the city of architecture and design in 1999, and we were designated as a UNESCO city of music in 2008—one of only nine in the world.

[Patrick Grady]

The city is a real musical melting pot. It has produced countless artists. We should not read out lists in the House, and that is just as well, because I could use up the rest of my time simply reeling off the names of the bands that have formed in Glasgow or emerged directly from the Glasgow music scene. It has also provided the stage, as has been said, that has allowed bands to break out into the Scottish, the UK and the wider European scenes.

King Tut's Wah Wah Hut is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who also has the Hydro—

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): And the Barrowland.

**Patrick Grady:** My hon. Friend could perhaps intervene and list some of the venues in her constituency. However, the Canadian band the Barenaked Ladies, for example, had their break in King Tut's, and I saw my brother-in-law's band, Tallahassee Falls, there just a few weeks ago.

In Glasgow North, we have the likes of Cottiers, the Oran Mor and the Kelvingrove bandstand—my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central has most of the Kelvingrove Park, but I have the bandstand, and I am looking forward to seeing Tom Jones there in a few weeks' time. Cottiers has just finished its excellent dance and chamber projects, and I was delighted to get a little light relief by going to one of the performances there just before the EU referendum.

Glasgow is also home to the annual Celtic Connections festival, which has global brand recognition now. It is a real contributor to some of the statistics mentioned earlier in UK Music's "Wish You Were Here" report. Some 1.4 million people attended music events in Glasgow in 2015, with 450,000 tourists generating £105 million and sustaining more than 1,000 jobs in the city.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Next Monday and Tuesday, the Culture, Media and Sport Committee is visiting Glasgow to take evidence for our forthcoming culture inquiry, which will include the creative industries. Clearly, copyright is very important in this day and age to sustain creativity—UK Music backs the music industry, and on the literary side there is the Authors Licensing and Collecting Society. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is going to talk about a rival to the Edinburgh festival, but does he agree that it is really important in terms of sustaining creativity and the roots of our creative industries, that the many people who do not have great commercial backing have protection from unfair contract terms, so that they can benefit from the fruits of their work? Does he see a role for the Government in improving that situation?

**Patrick Grady:** Those are very fair points, and the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made similar points about the importance of European regulation. In terms of online and digital expansion—I am aware there was a debate about some of this in Westminster Hall—these are all issues that are being challenged. The hon. Gentleman's Committee is welcome to visit Glasgow, and if it would like such some suggestions of where they

can sample the cultural scene or indeed some of the craft products I mentioned earlier, we would be happy to provide some.

There are also things that we as individual parliamentarians can do. In my office, I make space on the wall for a rotating display of works by local artists. In the past year, I have had Chris Stephens—not the one who represents Glasgow South West, but a street artist and designer from Nautilus Inkworks; Michelle Campbell, who does geometric renderings; Andy Peutherer, who does landscapes; Frances Corr, who depicts everyday items; and John Martin, who captures characters, including our current and former First Ministers. There is therefore a range of ways in which we can sport a creative industries.

It is important as well that local authorities do the same. This year, the West End Festival in Glasgow was sadly curtailed because of a lack of funding and support, and the famous parade that goes down the Byers Road was unable to take place. However, I was pleased that the Scottish Government agreed that an area of land in my constituency, Kelvin meadow and the Children's wood, should not be designated for housing because one Member made a point about its importance for children and young people. This is a space where they can have creative and wild play. It is very important that we protect those open spaces, especially in urban areas, so that young people can nurture their creative talent.

There is also responsibility for the devolved Governments in supporting education and tackling the skills gap, as was mentioned earlier. The Scottish Government are also putting money into a film studio in Scotland.

The greatest unknown is Brexit, which many Members have touched on. I agree wholeheartedly with almost every word that the hon. Member for Bristol East said, and so do not feel the need to repeat it.

**Alison Thewliss:** Does my hon. Friend agree that for specialist institutions in Glasgow, such as the Glasgow School of Art and the Royal Conservatoire, there is a great deal of risk for their students from Brexit? At the moment, the Conservatoire offers a unique melting pot of trad, jazz and classical, with pipers playing alongside ballerinas—there are all kinds of things in the mix. However, all that is under threat if the Conservatoire can no longer be the international institution that it would like to be.

**Patrick Grady:** That is absolutely correct. The artistic and musical communities are very concerned about the impact that Brexit will have, especially on the free movement of people and their ability to travel to festivals, either as artists or participants.

I am aware that other Members are very keen to speak and so will conclude. It is hugely important to nurture future generations, especially in the context of the Brexit result. We have a duty to open and expand our cultural horizons, and I hope that today's debate goes some way towards that.

4.1 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I congratulate the Members involved on bringing this very important debate to the House. I want to highlight

the creative industries for which the city of Edinburgh, the world's first UNESCO City of Literature, is renowned: writing and publishing.

Books might be changing as the electronic world takes over, but one thing will remain constant: the creation of new works will always need writers. However, writing is a less viable occupation now, with average incomes down to about £11,000 in 2014. We can romanticise the image of the artist in the garret reheating gruel—or porridge—for sustenance, but that is no way for someone to live in the 21st century, and we should be concerned.

The Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society highlights the economic contribution of writers. In 2014, it was £84 billion of gross value added, which is a year-on-year increase of 8.9%. The Publishers Association tells me that published material earned £4.4 billion last year, three quarters of that in books, and boosted the balance of payments, with 43% of publishers' sales being exports. Those are serious economic benefits. Last year, 254 million books were exported; a stack 13,000 miles high. If laid down with their spines up, those books would go more than halfway round the world. There are also online journals, e-books and other digital content. Where would the games industry be without talented storytellers? We must support our writers and publishers; together they make a massive economic contribution.

There is another, even more important reason to support them: we need writers. We need artists of all trades, because art is what makes life, but writers are special. Without them there would be no new books, plays, short stories or poetry. There would be no great speeches for party leaders, no new films at the cinema and no new dramas on television. "Coronation Street", "Eastenders" and "River City" would judder to a halt, and time would be up for "Dr Who" and "Outlander"—

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Shame!

**Deidre Brock:** Indeed. Both those shows make welcome contributions to the local economy and tourism, which would be lost.

Writers fill the space around us with art. They create our environment and enhance our lives. They should at least get the chance of earning a living. Some make it big, such as Irvine Welsh, who hails from my constituency and who has had substantial success. He did it the hard way, learning his trade while working other jobs. He was helped by Kevin Williamson, who still lives in Leith and who was a one-man dynamo in the early 1990s. Williamson's publishing efforts changed the face of Scottish literature. Without him, we might not have had Welsh, Laura Hird, Alan Warner or Toni Davidson. Rebel Inc. altered the direction of Scottish writing, and Kevin Williamson's contribution should be marked.

Irvine Welsh is an exception, however. Most writers make only a very modest income from their trade. Writers are vital, but we do not support them enough. As the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) has helpfully mentioned, we have created a less helpful environment for the creative industries by voting to leave the EU. This was not discussed during the campaigns, but as is the case for other industries, cutting the creative industries off from a potential workforce and potential clients must be damaging, and, as has been mentioned, those are not the only things that will be lost. For example, Creative Edinburgh, in my constituency, is

engaged in a two-year project funded by the European Commission partnering creative hubs around Europe with the European Business Network to promote and support the creative economy. That two-year project may be safe from the storms of Brexit, but what will replace such projects in the little Britain of the future?

My constituency is full of extraordinarily talented people, such as novelist Val McDermid, artists Ruth Nicol and Joyce Gunn Cairns, the creatives behind LeithLate and Citizen Curator, people in successful software, digital and advertising companies and more than 11,000 people employed in design. The computer gaming industry, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) and which is already a major part of the Dundee economy, is becoming a serious and growing part of Edinburgh's economy. These creative hubs attract people from all over these islands and from abroad.

Creative businesses flourish in my constituency: independent art galleries, shops such as Flux that sell handmade and unique products, and Kalypso Collective working in the fields of conceptual art, scenography and visual art. Will their viability survive Brexit? When the melting pot, which so many Members have referred to, cools and the exchange of ideas slows, creativity is stunted and output shrinks. Artistic viability becomes strained and economic benefits are reduced and perhaps extinguished. We need to stimulate the creative industries, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments about how exactly the Government propose to do that in the current situation.

The Chancellor could start, for example, with greater and better-targeted tax breaks for the creative industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West mentioned, devolving control of those to Scotland would be extremely helpful. Then the Chancellor could loosen the austerity noose that is strangling public services, to see whether the support that central and local government offered the arts could be restored.

Since we are heading down the EU exit ramp, we must secure the flow of people who make our creative industries viable. We need immigration policies that will bring people here and let them study, work and make their homes here. We need easier immigration, and more of it. The creative industries need more Government support for exports and help to open markets and guarantee payments. If the arms exporters can get it, why not creatives? We need creatives to be high up the agenda on overseas missions, with Government selling the ideas and products. These creatives are making a damn fine fist of it, and it is about time they got much more recognition and assistance.

4.8 pm

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Members who obtained this important debate. I would like to address the role of the university sector in the creative industries. In doing so, I am indebted for their assistance to Universities Scotland and, in particular, to Edinburgh Napier University, which is situated in my constituency.

Scotland has always been a creative nation, and Scotland's universities have always been at the heart of that creativity. Scottish creativity, as we have heard this afternoon, punches far above its weight on the global stage. World-leading talent has emerged from Glasgow School of

[Joanna Cherry]

Art, including Turner prize winners such as Duncan Campbell. Acclaimed stars of stage and screen, including Alan Cumming, David Tennant and James McAvoy, have all studied at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. We are very proud in Scotland of the literary success of novelists such as Ian Rankin, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, which is my own alma mater. We are also proud of Scotland's previous makar—that is our poet laureate—Liz Lochhead, who was a writer in residence at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design and the University of Glasgow.

Several of my hon. Friends have mentioned the video game “Lemmings”, invented by a Scottish graduate, Mike Dailly, which first put the great city of Dundee on the map for computer games. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) was a little unkind in suggesting that members of Her Majesty's Official Opposition could presently be described as lemmings; lemmings put me more in mind of Brexiteers, and it was very amusing to watch some of them attempt to scabble back up the cliff face in the debate on EU nationals yesterday. I also want to mention Scottish fashion graduate Rachael Barrett, whose designs were chosen and worn by Lady Gaga.

Edinburgh Napier University in my constituency prepares graduates for employment in a significant number of the creative industries, through undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and programmes in its school of arts and creative industries, its school of computing and its business school. It engages proactively with industry and professional bodies through knowledge exchange activities, continuing professional development programmes and provision of advice and support. In particular, it hosts Screen Academy Scotland, a joint venture with the University of Edinburgh that is recognised as a centre of excellence in film practice and has celebrated 10 years of its prestigious status as one of just three film academies in the UK accredited by Creative Skillset.

**John Howell:** I intervene as a fellow graduate of the University of Edinburgh. Does the hon. and learned Lady think there is something in the water in Edinburgh that has helped create those creative industries, or is it just the hard work of the university, which has concentrated on the creative industries and achieved so much for them?

**Joanna Cherry:** Edinburgh of course now hosts more than one university. Its oldest university is our joint alma mater, but it also has Napier University in my constituency, which I have just been talking about, and Heriot-Watt University. Possibly what the hon. Gentleman refers to is due to those universities, but it is also very much due to an atmosphere across the education sector in Edinburgh, which fosters interest in music and the arts.

Of course, we are also very privileged to host the greatest international festival anywhere in the world. Growing up in Edinburgh and getting to attend events at the festival and fringe as a wee girl was the sort of opportunity that not all children get. In my constituency, we have tried to ensure that the festival reaches out beyond Edinburgh city centre to the suburbs and housing

schemes. That has resulted in some very vibrant arts activity in Wester Hailes, a big housing scheme in my constituency.

Edinburgh Napier is just up the road from Wester Hailes. Many of its students and graduates have achieved considerable success and external recognition, which they have built on to achieve strong careers in the creative industries. Its students' work features regularly at international film festivals, including Berlin, Venice, Cannes, Beijing, Kolkata and—closer to home—Edinburgh. Graduates of Napier have won awards in journalism and advertising. Its music students have been awarded or shortlisted for national and international prizes, including first prize in the international Jean Sibelius composition competition.

Importantly, Edinburgh Napier offers businesses opportunities to link up with a diverse range of creative students for freelance assignments. That ensures that students develop their skills in a business environment and the businesses themselves benefit from the students' professional output. The success of Screen Academy Scotland demonstrates how universities can support the continued professional development of those working in the industry. Illustrious graduates of Edinburgh Napier include the film director Lynne Ramsay, the photographers David Eustace and Colin Baxter, and the BBC broadcaster Catriona Shearer, to name just a few.

The creative industries thrive on talent and depend on a well-educated workforce. Universities are a rich source of that talent. Analysis recently published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport showed that last year more than half of jobs in the creative industries—almost 60%—were filled by people with at least a degree or equivalent qualification, compared with 30% of all jobs in the UK.

There is often a view that creative talent is innate, but that is not the case. Talent must be nurtured and developed, and that is what higher education does. Scotland's universities collaborate directly with creative companies and industry bodies in the design and development of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. However, there is a problem with the skills gap, and it is that issue which I would like the Minister to address. Research carried out by Creative Skillset found that 28% of companies in the creative media industries report skills gaps within the existing workforce across the UK, with a slightly higher proportion in Scotland—31%—reporting such skills gaps.

It is interesting to note that only 12% of those studying creative industry-related subjects at postgraduate level in Scotland are from Scotland, compared with the proportion of non-EU postgraduate students studying in Scotland, which is 70%. This means that Scotland needs to retain its creative graduates, regardless of where they are from. We need to encourage people who have come to Scotland to study creative subjects to stay in Scotland after they graduate. These graduates are innovative, enterprising and ambitious, and will contribute not only to the Scottish economy, but more broadly to the social, cultural and economic life and development of Scotland. It is important to ensure, therefore, that the needs of the creative industries and the broader creative and knowledge economy is not lost through the post-study work route.

The UK Government's immigration policy—specifically, the proposals for tier 2—is the major deterrent to greater flows of talent coming from outside the European

Union into Scotland and the UK. I fear that if the Brexit vote is to be implemented, the problem will only get worse, as students coming from the European Union will also be affected.

**Alison Thewliss:** My hon. and learned Friend is making an excellent case about the visas for students who are studying in Scotland. I was made aware by Glasgow School of Art of a case where an expert in a specific field who was visiting Glasgow on holiday wanted to come in and share his expertise with students at Glasgow School of Art, but the school had to refuse that request because it would have had serious implications for its own visa status. Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that much more flexibility is needed to allow people to come and share their talent and expertise, without the necessity for formal visas in such situations?

**Joanna Cherry:** I entirely agree. Every country requires some sort of immigration policy, but we need to look at what is of benefit to our country and our economy. Flexibility of visas in that situation is clearly desirable.

The rules surrounding the UK's current student immigration policy in relation to employment are often prohibitively restrictive for graduates from creative disciplines, because the starting salary threshold is based on average salaries in other sectors, such as accounting and engineering. We all know that graduates in the creative industries, at least in the early stages of their career, will earn considerably less than that. Such graduates tend not to be in full time employment; rather, they freelance. They may work as a barista, a waiter or a waitress and support their portfolio careers with part-time jobs. It is interesting to observe that our major English-speaking competitors—Canada, the USA, Australia and New Zealand—do not have that minimum earnings threshold.

For a number of years Universities Scotland has been making a positive case for a more competitive post-study work visa for Scotland, because it would be a significant benefit to universities both as employers and as recruiters of students. There is support for a change in immigration policy in Scotland among university principals, staff and students, among business leaders and across all political parties in the Scottish Parliament, including the Conservative and Unionist party.

The Scottish Affairs Committee of this Parliament in its recent report found that current rules for students studying in Scotland to remain in Scotland are too restrictive and are preventing businesses from finding skilled workers. It is clear that in order to support the creative industries in Scotland and beyond, throughout the UK, the Government need to reintroduce post-study work visas. I urge the Minister to address this issue in his summing up today.

4.19 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to be summing up for the Scottish National party in what has been a very fine debate. It feels like we have been on some sort of geographic cultural tour de force, as we have learned about the delights of the many bidding cities for European city of culture, as well as the other cultural delights of many other cities. We are all enriched by learning about some of the great cultural facets of all these different and

differing parts of the UK. I, of course, declare my interest as a former recording artist and refer to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I have spoken in practically every single debate on the creative industries in my 15 years in this House. It is always fantastic to come to these debates and just learn and see how many more Members are taking an interest in their creative industries and the things that underpin them, such as intellectual property and some of the fiscal levers we have at our disposal.

I congratulate those who opened the debate; I forgot to mention the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott). It is worth reminding ourselves how fantastically we do in this country. The UK is the largest cultural economy in the world relative to GDP. We are the largest producer of TV and radio content in Europe. We are the largest producer of recorded music in Europe and the second largest in the world. We have the third largest filmed entertainment market globally. As chair of the all-party group on writers, it was also fantastic for me to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) about her wonderful authors and writers, and it is great to know that we are the largest publishing market in Europe.

The creative industries are growing almost twice as fast as the wider economy. I think it was the Minister who first mentioned, in a tweet, that we are now worth £10 million an hour to the UK economy. Many have subsequently picked up that figure. The creative industries are also a huge employer, and the number of jobs in them increased by 5.5% between 2013 and 2014.

There is incredible growth in our creative sector and its industries, therefore. When so many of our sectors are flatlining, we are practically reindustrialising this nation on the imagination, creativity and talent of the people of this country. What a wonderful way to grow our economy, based on those virtues.

**Alison Thewliss:** I do not know whether my hon. Friend is aware that the artists studios in Glasgow are so successful that they are having to expand and expand. I visited the Briggait in my constituency. They are planning their expansion because they have filled the space they have, as have Wasp Studios. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need further support from Government for the artists studios in the city?

**Pete Wishart:** Absolutely. We are all seeing and experiencing—as we have heard in most of the contributions and interventions today—that every constituency and community now has some form of creative hub, providing highly skilled jobs, giving opportunities to young people, employing people and encouraging them, and culturally enriching their communities. I pay tribute to the wonderful work done in my hon. Friend's constituency and in those of so many other Members.

This is about much more than the hard economics, important though they are in assessing the contribution the creative industries make. The creative industries provide a conduit which allows for the cultural enrichment of our nation and communities. We are successful in this country primarily because we are fantastically good at producing this stuff. We are also successful because we have managed to provide the conditions that allow talent to develop and grow. I have always said that one

[Pete Wishart]

of our major responsibilities as legislators and Members of this House is to try to create the conditions that allow the optimum environment for our artists and those who invest in our talent and build our creative industries, so that they can continue to develop, thrive and grow. We have been successful in that, because up to this point we have managed to provide the frameworks that allow our creative industries to grow.

There are certain things that need to be in place in order to have a successful creative industries sector. Some of them are fiscal, and some are at the disposal of this Government. We have already heard about the difference some of the tax reliefs have made to various sectors, particularly computer games, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) made such a good point and recognised. When we deploy these things, we get a massive return and a massive hit. Some of the support is resourcing, therefore, such as ensuring that funds are available for what are mainly small and medium-sized enterprises to develop and grow. There is so much more we can do to incentivise our SMEs, to ensure we continue to create that optimal environment for development in these sectors.

Other things are probably a bit more difficult to achieve, and they are what I want to address. I want us to ensure that the artists who are prepared to use their talent are properly rewarded for the work they produce and those who invest in it are properly rewarded for the investment they make. We must strive to make that always the case and to ensure that those who produce this wonderful work, which we see and experience and love so much, are rewarded properly. This is why we need to ensure that the intellectual property rights of those involved in our creative sector are always respected and progressed.

Our creative industries inhabit a part of the economy that is fast changing, developing all the time and always open to technological innovation, and more than anything we are seeing the migration to digitisation in the online environment. That presents probably a bigger challenge to our creative industries than to any other sector of the economy, which is why we must be ever vigilant around the demands and needs of the creative economy and sector. Even though the creative industries are a huge success story—we can see the contribution they make to our economy—many people in music, film and television production, publishing and design still struggle to be rewarded properly for their efforts. We have to design a properly functioning digital market that enables creators and rights holders to secure the full value of their work online.

It has to be said again that the market is being distorted by the tech giants. The likes of Google and YouTube—the gateways to online content—distort the market and make it difficult for artists and those who invest in their talent to be rewarded for their work. Google is a fantastic facility—I am sure we all use it—but it makes such a big impression on the market and makes life so difficult for those in the creative sector. We have to get on top of that. So often, searches on Google and through other big tech companies still direct people towards sites that are either illegal or do not properly reward artists and musicians. That must now stop.

That facilitates the worries about the growing “value gap” between rising creative consumption and decreasing revenues, which undermine the incomes of people in the sector. I think mainly of the streaming sites, on which we had a helpful debate yesterday—several people in this debate spoke then about the remuneration of artists online. We have to look at these issues, and I am sure the Minister took away some valuable points that helped to shape that debate. Someone is growing rich from the creative endeavours of our wonderful artists, but it is not the artists. Parasite companies—little more than hosts with algorithms that store content—are growing rich on the back of the creativity of the people of this country. Somehow we have to re-tilt the balance much more in favour of the artists, creators and inventors—the talent—and those prepared to invest in them.

I have to turn finally to the EU debate. We really enjoyed the remarks from the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). She was spot on. This is a potential catastrophe for our creative industries. We cannot mince our words: being taken out of the EU would be really serious for our creative sector. We have heard the issues about the single market, about how these wonderful products will be placed properly without further tariffs within the EU, and about the impact on our creative sector and its product placement, but there is also the movement of people. One reason our creative industries are so successful and why London is probably the creative hub not just of Europe but of the whole globe is the fact that it has been able to draw talent from the EU uninhibited by any concerns about visa arrangements. There is a real concern, therefore, about what will happen to the people employed in our creative sector, particularly in cities such as London, and also Edinburgh, which is dependent on talent from overseas.

The biggest innovation at the moment—the one that will make the biggest difference to how we use and access online content—is perhaps the digital single market, but we will not be part of it. The Minister said yesterday that we could somehow—I do not know how—have proxy conversations with France and Germany about it. If we leave the European Union we will be excluded from that and have no say in it whatsoever.

Thankfully, most copyright laws that were designed in Europe have been incorporated into UK law, so we need not concern ourselves too much with the protection of artists, writers and creators as those laws have now been subsumed. However, a massive debate is going on in Europe about innovation and new copyright laws, and we will be excluded from that, which will be of massive detriment to our creative industries.

The hon. Member for Bristol East touched on the issue of what leaving the European Union will do to us psychologically, and where it leaves us culturally. If anything, music, cultural works, and things that we enjoy are about sharing and working communally. We have lost something quite profound in how we talk about ourselves as a nation and how we share all the wonderful culture that we produce. It is as if we have stepped aside and walked away from our partners, and that will have a profound impact and psychological effect on artists up and down the country. I do not know how we recover from that or start to address it, but we can almost sense the depression in our artistic and creative community.

On Tuesday night I hosted a meeting of the all-party group on intellectual property, and all that people were talking about was leaving the EU and the impact and depression that that has introduced into the sector. We must work hard to address that and think about how we can excite the sector. That is down to the Minister, because it will be his job and responsibility. Unlike the Secretary of State, who went against almost 99% of the people he is notionally supposed to represent in the creative industries and who desperately wanted to remain in the European Union, the Minister was on the remain side and he must try to design a way forward for the country. There are a couple of opportunities and ways in which he may be able to do that. For example, with the Digital Economy Bill he must reassure everybody in the sector that he will try to offset some of the difficulties and harm that will be done when we leave the European Union. He cannot do much about immigration, but he can speak to his colleagues about what we can do to secure and retain talent.

The Digital Economy Bill is great, and it honours the commitment made by the Conservatives to ensure universal access to broadband. I am grateful for that, as I am for the inclusion of intellectual property rights that state that online crime will be of the same nature and stature as offline crime. However, we need a big job to ensure that we start to rebuild some of the confidence that has taken such a heavy knock over the past few weeks.

I am sure the Minister saw the fine report on the creative industries in Scotland—my colleagues have referred to it a few times. I am delighted that so much time was spent on the city of Dundee, and to learn what happened there and what underpinned the success of the creative economy. However, I was disappointed by the response—I thought that we might have secured membership of the UK-wide Creative Industries Council, but that has been turned down. I was also disappointed that there was no recognition of how tax reliefs in the creative sector apply across the United Kingdom, and I urge the Minister to consider those issues again.

This has been a fantastic debate, and it is great to see so much interest. I wish everybody well in any competitions that their various cities may be in—such as that for city of culture. It has been fantastic to learn about the wonderful cultural activities taking place. We should keep an interest in this sector as it is important for our economy. We have troubles now, but it is up to us to try to design a way forward. Let us hear what we can do; I look forward to hearing from the Minister.

4.34 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) on securing this important debate, and on her excellent and interesting speech, which set out a lot of fascinating facts, particularly about her constituency and fine home town of Sunderland. When I was four years old, we lived next door to people from Sunderland, which I thought was a country before I was corrected. It is clearly a very fine place with rich culture and history, and she is obviously and rightly proud of it. I also congratulate other hon. Members from both sides of the Chamber on supporting my hon. Friend in securing the debate, and Members who have made such thoughtful and interesting contributions this afternoon.

I have to make my contribution today from the Dispatch Box, but I should say that I have a passionate and long-standing personal interest in the creative industries, especially those relating to the arts and most especially music, in which this country is a world leader in just about every sphere. As I said in the Westminster Hall debate yesterday, to which much reference has been made—the Minister will respond to this debate, as he did yesterday—I was a part-time jazz musician in my youth, as well as a member of the Musicians Union. I should perhaps declare an interest in that the union has provided support to my constituency party in past elections. I also said in yesterday's debate that I secured my very first Adjournment debate some 18 years ago on the subject of public funding for jazz, which was and remains far too low. Public funding for the arts across the board is vital. Perhaps only the commercially successful field of popular music can be self-sustaining. Even with that, online rip-offs are making inroads into incomes, as we heard yesterday.

We in Britain are astonishingly good with music. We have several of the finest orchestras and many of the finest classical musicians anywhere in the world. To gauge just how talented a musical nation we are, I refer to the situation some 35 or so years ago, when a European youth orchestra was formed. Auditions for the orchestra were held across Europe. If the best musicians had been chosen, all the chairs would have been filled by young British musicians. In the event, half the seats were allocated to the British and the others were shared out between the other European nations.

In the field of popular music, Britain has been a dominant force for decades. From The Beatles to Adele, we stride the world with a seemingly unending stream of brilliance. It has to be said that we are helped because English is the major international language—that undoubtedly helps our creative exports across the piece—but music is essentially about harmonious sounds that do not require translation. When it comes to melody and harmony, and indeed rhythm, we can match the best.

To return to jazz, we have produced brilliant musicians and superb music for many decades. For some 15 years, I was a board member of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra. I have seen scores and possibly hundreds of breathtakingly great young musicians pass through the NYJO ranks. I know jazz music only too well, so I know just how good those young musicians are. Amy Winehouse sang with NYJO in her teens, as did another wonderful singer called Sumudu Jayatilaka, who Members may have seen singing in the millennium celebrations at the O<sub>2</sub> Arena at midnight on that day.

I have perhaps over-indulged my musical interests, but Britain has great success in other fields. We continue to make some of the finest films in the world, and our film studios, actors, directors, technicians and all the skills in the industry bring in substantial revenues, while they entertain, educate and enthral us all.

In theatre, we draw in millions of tourists from across the world, especially to London, to watch our great actors perform in top-class productions. There has been a recent British boom even in dance and choreography, in all styles. In broadcasting, our radio and television is arguably the best in the world, and drama and documentary exports are money-spinners for us. I once had the misfortune to watch the Olympic games on holiday in

[Kelvin Hopkins]

an unnamed foreign country. The presentation was dismal—I was used to the superb sports coverage of the BBC, which was light years away in quality.

I could continue to wax lyrical about our creative industries—I have not covered some fields in the time allowed, for which I apologise. We have superb museums, a great heritage sector and great writers—this is the land of Shakespeare, no less. However, I wish to make serious points about sustaining our success for the future. It is vital to give every young person with the talent and potential to develop as a musician, an actor or an artist the myriad technical skills needed across the sector. The seedcorn of talent in our young must be nurtured and supported, which means appropriate and necessary state funding. In music, instruments and tuition are expensive, and squeezing the budgets of local authorities and of education has meant cuts in provision. Music must not become the preserve only of the children of affluent parents, who simply pay for their children's instruments and tuition—as, indeed, happened in my own case. Instruments must be available for all young people to borrow and tuition must be free for children of school age.

Young people from all backgrounds must be given their chance to develop and shine, not just for themselves but for our future success as a creative nation. Our recent colleague and successful actor, the brilliant Glenda Jackson, said in this place that she could never have attended drama school without a full state grant and not having to pay fees. I wish to see education funding restored to the way it was when I was a student in the 1960s and have said so many times from the Back Benches.

We must also defend and sustain public service broadcasting, a vital and civilising feature of Britain, which, like the NHS, is the envy of the world. Public support, wherever it is needed, should be provided with generous state funding for the future of our industries and the magnificent contribution they make to our lives, our culture and our economy. We are a brilliant nation and we should continue to shine.

4.41 pm

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** I am very grateful to have the opportunity to appear before you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in this important debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) on securing it. This is a wonderful opportunity to debate our hugely successful creative industries. I would also like to use this opportunity to welcome the official culture spokesman for the Labour party, the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins). I had the chance to welcome him in a Westminster Hall debate yesterday. I made the point that when I made my maiden speech on the Opposition Benches in June 2005, he was on the Government Benches and he followed me in the debate, so he has always had a special place in my heart. Yesterday, I discovered that he is a part-time jazz musician—I am playing for time while I find my notes, by the way—and so brings considerable skill and knowledge to the debate.

The hon. Member for Sunderland Central made a brilliant opening speech, in which she talked about

Software City in Sunderland, set up in 2009. It was a brilliant speech because she brought home to me something I found out on referendum day, 23 June, when I went to Newcastle to do my bit to secure the spectacular result we ended up with. I met businesses from Newcastle and Sunderland. One point they made to me was that they felt very strongly that, although they had a lot of support and investment from around the country, in the north-east region it was not well known enough how successful Sunderland and Newcastle are in terms of hi-tech industries. The point they were trying to get across, of course, was that they want to encourage kids at school, or those leaving school to go to college, further education or university, to consider these industries. I went away with a promise, as it were, that I would do all I could to help.

**Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab):** Given that the Minister is talking about young people in particular, he might reflect on some of the challenges around social mobility and making sure that access to creative industries is available to young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Mr Vaizey:** I completely support the hon. Gentleman on that. I commend in particular the Next Gen group, started by Ian Livingstone, the well-known promoter of the games industry and the founder of many successful games companies. I have also been to some fantastic courses, supported by companies such as Microsoft in further education colleges, which reach out to people from different backgrounds and give them the hands-on skills they need to go straight into employment. The great challenge the creative industries face is giving young people the skills they need. Too often, the courses in further education and universities are too far removed from the world of work in the creative industries. It is changing so fast because of the change in technology, but let me return to some of the excellent speeches in the debate.

**Fiona Mactaggart rose—**

**Mr Vaizey:** Having retrieved my notes, I was just about to refer to the speech of the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), but she wants to intervene.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Will the Minister, who kindly came to the agency events hosted by Battersea arts centre here in the House, reflect on the concept of using creative organisations such as Battersea arts centre to enable and provide mentoring for young people to implement creative ideas?

**Mr Vaizey:** We are certainly going to look at that. We published a culture White Paper a couple of months ago, which I shall come on to in some detail. Let me first say that one reason why I found myself in difficulty earlier relates to what I have discovered in two debates with the hon. Member for Luton North—that he gives commendably short speeches. I see the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) nodding with some understanding. I strongly commend the hon. Member for Luton North for this particular ability. Short speeches are more than welcome in this place.

Let me say how much I enjoyed hearing the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White), who has done so much to promote the

video games industry. I thank him for talking about the arts and widening the scope of this debate. The right hon. Member for Slough spoke about the importance of arts education, to which I shall return in a few minutes. Sadly, I was not in my place to hear the entire speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), but I heard him in yesterday's debate, when he talked so eloquently about copyright. Today, he widened his remarks to include general support for the music industry and particularly for live music. The hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who is the other co-chair of the all-party group on video games, spoke about Dundee as one of the great homes of video games development. He made yet another valiant bid on behalf of the SNP to take yet more powers from the Westminster Government.

I was not here for the full speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). I was about to say that he was an “unlikely champion” of the arts, but that would be unfair. At Prime Minister's Questions yesterday, he commended Southend yet again. I have worked out why. When I was drinking in a pub with Tracey Emin a few weeks ago—[*Interruption.*] Did I say Tracey Emin? The pub landlady came out and told me what a huge fan she was of Margaret Thatcher. On the day that we learn that we were about to get a second female Prime Minister, I recall her saying that she was a huge fan of Margaret Thatcher. She showed me a picture that featured the landlady, Margaret Thatcher and my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West. He has promised me that he will find out where that photograph was taken. We wait to hear, but I think that was the beginning of my hon. Friend's cultural career.

I commend the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), particularly for mentioning e-sports, which I passionately support. I am worried that the French are taking e-sports extremely seriously, and we need to promote them here. I was delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman mention them, particularly on a day when Manchester City have signed Kieran “Kez” Brown as its first e-sports professional football player. I also appreciated the hon. Gentleman's point about local council support. I suspect that the sub-text was an attack on a Labour council from an SNP Member. Nevertheless, the support of local authorities is vital.

Let me thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) for mentioning our very successful publishing industry. We do not talk enough about it, partly because it does not receive the sort of support that the Government give to, say, film and video games. As she rightly pointed out, this is our most successful creative industry. Indeed, Scotland supplies some of our greatest authors. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) expanded the debate even wider, talking about the fashion industry, as well as importantly about work visas, general access to skills and immigration issues post-Brexit.

A number of themes emerged in the debate. One was the unmitigated success of the longest-serving creative industries Minister in recent history! In the last six years, we have seen the exponential growth of the creative industries. Let me try to make a serious point here. These are our most successful industries, growing at three times the rate of the economy. Having done this job in opposition and in government, I have seen an

increasing number of colleagues in this place who realise the importance of the creative industries and take them so seriously, and this has been reflected in the contributions of hon. Members today.

The creative industries are affected by very specific issues—including intellectual property protection, about which the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire has spoken eloquently for many years, and access to skills, which has also been raised in the Chamber—but they are highly successful. They are partly turbo-charged by tax credits for film, games and animation, which also extend to the arts, supporting theatre and galleries.

The right hon. Member for Slough rightly drew attention to the importance of arts education. We will differ on the question of whether the arts are being excluded from schools, and I expect that there will be constant debate about it. I personally reject the idea. People may think that an increased focus on science and technology, which perhaps has not been as strong as it could have been over the last few years, somehow means that the arts will suffer, but no one is preventing a headteacher from focusing on the arts and culture. Indeed, I would encourage it. Certainly, working with the present Secretary of State for Education and her predecessor, I have been able to secure important funding for music education and the creation of music education hubs, as well as a number of important programmes to promote heritage and culture.

We are also working on diversity, with the aim of reaching out to more and more people to extend cultural experiences. Our Culture White Paper—the first to be published for more than 50 years—focuses on the cultural citizens programme. We hope to launch a pilot in the autumn, embedding a cohort of young people from schools around the country with arts organisations and giving them a wide experience of the arts.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. I especially welcome the work that the Government have done on music hubs. Redbridge Music Service is one of the participants, and it does an outstanding job. May I urge the Minister and his Department to keep a close eye on the consequences of local government funding cuts for many arts and cultural programmes, which are coming under enormous pressure because of the strain on councils' finances?

**Mr Vaizey:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. He has allowed me to make a further point about the culture White Paper, in which we announced our proposed Great Place scheme. We have seen the huge success of Liverpool's designation as European capital of culture, and the huge success of the city of culture scheme, initiated by the last Labour Government, which first benefited Derry/Londonderry and will benefit Hull next year. The Great Place scheme is designed to allow local authorities a small amount of funding to create a cultural strategy. The North East Culture Partnership was one of the inspirations for the idea. In the NECP, 12 councils and five universities have come together to create a coherent vision for culture in the north-east. It is important to note that it is a long-term vision, covering not just the next 12 months but the next 15 years.

I agree with the hon. Member for Glasgow North that we should encourage councils to understand the importance of culture in shaping places, creating

[Mr Vaizey]

jobs and bringing communities together, but also in improving health and wellbeing and contributing to education.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I agree with the Minister that we should encourage councils to support culture, but when their funding is being squeezed, they have to cut because there is no alternative. Does the Minister not agree that we must provide the funds as well as the encouragement?

**Mr Vaizey:** I do not want to range too far from my brief and start commenting on local authority funding, but, in my view, that is possible. I object to the fact that culture is always at the back of the queue, and that when it comes to making savings, it is the first thing that some councils look at. However, many imaginative councils—Labour and Conservative, and possibly even SNP—have shown that it is possible to continue to fund culture, and to embed it in many different areas rather than simply putting it in a silo labelled “culture”.

I think that I have covered quite a lot of ground in a slightly bitty way. I have not really put together the narrative that I hoped to put together, partly because I was slightly discombobulated by the pithiness of the remarks of the hon. Member for Luton North, but let me say this. I think that we in the United Kingdom are incredibly lucky to have such extraordinary cultural and creative industries, driven by some remarkable people. They have been supported strongly by Government, particularly through tax reliefs, and also in focusing on skills and a wider strategy.

We must make sure that in a Brexit world we work with the arts and creative industries, which are the calling cards of this fantastic country. We must ensure that they are part of the debate. We must ensure that, as the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) said, they have a voice in a practical way. I can tell her that I came here from a meeting this morning of the inter-ministerial group, where we discussed DCMS-relevant sectors, looking at key business areas across Government. Tourism, the creative industries, the media, and arts and culture were all part of that debate. We have already seconded one very senior civil servant to the Brexit unit. We will make sure, in a practical way, that culture and the creative industries are taken account of, but also, in a more wide-ranging way, that the voices of our artists and creators are heard as we forge a new way forward for the United Kingdom.

4.55 pm

**Julie Elliott:** The Minister was very creative after he lost his notes. I was highly impressed with his recall of some of my speech. I have to say, however, that if he visited any pub in Sunderland, a photograph of the former Prime Minister would be the last thing he is likely to find behind the bar; it would not be welcome in my city.

This has been a very interesting and informative debate with contributions from Members in all parts of the House. We have ranged from Scotland, to Slough, to Southend, to Sunderland—

**Kerry McCarthy:** And Bristol.

**Julie Elliott:** I am coming to Bristol. These are all parts of the UK with very diverse economies. The creative industries are very important to all parts of the country. Although many Members from Scotland contributed, they did not mention my favourite festival in Scotland, which my son-in-law introduced me to—the Worlds, the big pipe band competition at the beginning of August, which he has played at on occasion. The contribution made to our national economy by the creative industries is enormous, but often almost silent. For that reason alone, it is important that this debate has happened.

Education has been mentioned, including access to learning and the number of people applying for qualifications. We have significant concerns about the latter, and it is one thing I disagree with the Minister on. It is an issue that we and the Government need to watch. I would love to see a call for an industrial strategy on all levels.

On the impact of Brexit, the outstanding contribution was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). This is what is worrying us most about these industries. With regard to visas, when I talked to people before the referendum, I heard about the struggle that some of our artists have in getting to America. If that replicates itself in Europe, we will have very serious problems. I welcome what the Minister said about somebody having been seconded to the Brexit unit, because we cannot over-emphasise the importance of these matters.

I hope the Government do not overlook this growing, diverse and economically important area of policy, and the impacts that Brexit will have. I feel slightly reassured by what the Minister said about that. Members of all parties in the House would help if there is anything we can do, because that is important not just to the creativity in our country but to the thriving, growing industries that the creative industries are.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered support for the UK's creative industries and their contribution to the economy.

## Business without Debate

### OPPOSITION PARTIES (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)

*Resolved,*

That, notwithstanding the Resolution of the House of 23 March 2016 relating to Opposition Parties (Financial Assistance), the accounts to be published by each political party claiming financial assistance under paragraph 2.1 of the Resolution of 26 May 1999 relating to financial assistance for opposition parties, as codified and modified by the House of Commons Members Estimate Committee in the form set out in section 2 of Annex 2 of that Committee's report to the House of 16 March 2015 (HC 1132), shall be required to include the matters set out in the Schedule.

#### SCHEDULE

##### A. Financial Assistance: Official Opposition

(i) The identification of each person at least 50% of whose salary is, or has at any time during the financial year in question been, paid for from funds received under paragraph 2.6 (if they have worked for a named Member, together with the name of that Member) and either (a) the total remuneration earned by that person if in excess of the specified threshold or, if not, (b) the relevant pay band.

(ii) The total claimed under paragraph 2.6, showing a breakdown between (a) the total direct staff costs identified in (i) above met from funds received under paragraph 2.6 and (b) other costs, indicating the principal headings of such expenditure.

**B. Financial Assistance: Other parties**

(i) The total number of people at least 50% of whose salary is, or has at any time during the financial year in question been, paid for from funds received under paragraph 2.6, if they have worked for a named Member or for the parliamentary party as a whole, and the relevant pay band.

(ii) The total claimed under paragraph 2.6, showing a breakdown between (a) the total direct staff costs identified in (i) above met from funds received under paragraph 2.6 and (b) other costs, indicating the principal headings of such expenditure.

**C. Leader of the Opposition**

(i) The identification of each person at least 50% of whose salary is, or has at any time during the financial year in question been, paid for from funds received under paragraph 2.10, and either (a) the total remuneration earned by that person if in excess of the specified threshold or, if not (b) the relevant pay band.

(ii) The total claimed under paragraph 2.10, showing a breakdown between (a) the total direct staff costs identified in (i) above met from funds received under paragraph 2.10 and (b) other costs, indicating the principal headings of such expenditure.

**D. Travelling expenses**

The total claimed under paragraph 2.12.

**E. Representative money**

(i) The total number of people at least 50% of whose salary is, or has at any time during the financial year in question been, paid for from funds received under paragraph 2.19, if they have worked for a named Member or for the parliamentary party as a whole, and the relevant pay band.

(ii) The total claimed under paragraph 2.19, showing a breakdown between (a) the total direct staff costs identified in (i) above met from the funds received under paragraph 2.19 and (b) other costs, indicating the principal headings of such expenditure.

**F. Definitions**

The pay bands and threshold amount referred to above shall be those applicable for the year in question to Ministers' special advisers, as determined by the Accounting Officer of the House.—  
(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

## Sri Lanka: Human Rights

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

5 pm

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss the serious issue of human rights in Sri Lanka, with particular reference to the most recent session of the United Nations Human Rights Council and progress against the resolution that was agreed unanimously last year. I have taken a great interest in this issue since joining the House last year as vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for Tamils, not least because of the significant Tamil population in my constituency, whose lives have been directly affected by the atrocities of the Sri Lankan civil war. I should also draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests relating to my visit to the UNHRC in Geneva last year to lobby for that resolution.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I want to commend the hon. Gentleman's passion in championing the rights of the Tamil people. Only this week, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister claimed that his Government plan to set up a special court by next year to hear allegations of abuses during the brutal civil war. Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the Sri Lankan Government are merely paying lip service to the international community?

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her intervention. That is the specific issue that I want to spend some time addressing this afternoon, particularly international involvement in the prosecution of alleged war crimes from the civil war.

I am delighted to see so many members of the all-party parliamentary group here this afternoon, but I want to pay particular tribute to our chair, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), who would be here were it not for important constituency engagements. He has worked hard in his first year in office to champion the issues that I will be discussing this afternoon.

**Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I echo the praise for my hon. Friend's interest in this importance matter. My constituency also has one of the largest populations of Tamils, who are particularly concerned about the fact that the north and east of Sri Lanka remain heavily militarised. It appears that the Sri Lankan Government still have no serious plan to facilitate the return home of the largely Tamils and Muslims who have been displaced by the conflict.

**Wes Streeting:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the ongoing challenges. I will begin by talking about the history of the Sri Lankan civil war, but it is important to remember this afternoon that there are ongoing issues, such as human rights abuses, that need to be taken seriously by the international community and this House.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is most gracious in giving way—I did ask his permission beforehand. We should not forget the other human rights abuses that are happening in Sri Lanka. The

[Jim Shannon]

National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka has documented an estimated 450 incidents against Christian minorities since 2009. Since 2015, 130 incidents of intimidation, discrimination and violence against Christians have been recorded, and a campaign to close churches continues to this very day. Although the war has ended, does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need assurances from the UK Government and the Minister that they will do everything in their power to ensure that Sri Lanka moves further towards religious freedom for all, not away from it?

**Wes Streeting:** The hon. Gentleman is a long-standing champion in this House of highlighting the persecution of Christians and demanding, quite rightly, that the issue gets greater Government focus and attention. Although a smaller religious minority in Sri Lanka, the Christian population is there none the less and also faces human rights abuses that must be recognised, tackled and dealt with effectively.

The Sri Lankan civil war ended in May 2009 and lasted some 26 years. It was primarily between the LTTE—the Tamil Tigers—and the Sri Lankan Government army. It is estimated that up to 100,000 people were killed during the course of the bloody conflict. In 2009, the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, described the brutality in the north of the country as a “war without witness”. Since the conclusion of the civil war, so much of that witness testimony has come forward. In my constituency surgery, I have been horrified by the descriptions of what people have suffered, and I have met constituents who bear not only the mental scars, but the physical scars of that conflict. Serious allegations of human rights abuses have been made by both sides of the conflict, including allegations of murder, sexual violence, torture, disappearances, the use of civilians as human shields and the use of child soldiers. Mines were used in the conflict, although many have been removed since the war ended. Many of the people at the top of Sri Lankan society—Ministers, military leaders, and figures in the judiciary and in wider civil society—are suspected of being complicit in many of the atrocities that took place.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): As my hon. Friend knows, there are more Tamil constituents in the south of our borough than in the north. But we also have Sri Lankans living in London, and in other parts of Britain, who have come from the other communities. It is important that in this process we try also to get reconciliation in the diaspora. Does he agree that one way to bring that about would be if the Sri Lankan Government could guarantee that people from the UK, or elsewhere in the world, from the diaspora who wish to go back to visit their place of birth or their family will be protected? There is enormous fear, for understandable reasons, among many people living in this country that things will happen to them or to their relatives if they do return.

**Wes Streeting:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend and neighbour about that. One thing I find encouraging about the Tamil and Sinhalese population in my constituency is that a number of events are held throughout the year where they come together. That is the spirit of

reconciliation we need to promote, not just in the diaspora, but in Sri Lanka. We are pushing for a process of truth, justice and reconciliation. Indeed, in the 2009 speech I mentioned earlier, David Miliband told this House:

“How the conflict is ended will have a direct bearing on the prospects for long-term peace in the country. The Government there must win the peace as well as the war.”—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2009; Vol. 491, c. 1050.]

Members in the Chamber this afternoon will be aware that the closing weeks and days of the Sri Lankan civil war were among some of the most brutal and bloody, and certainly the Government of Rajapaksa gave very little encouragement that we could find that process of truth, justice and reconciliation. The election of President Sirisena last year offered some hope that there would be an opportunity for Sri Lanka to move forward, as he pledged both reform and reconciliation. I acknowledge that progress has been made under that Government, but what I will set out this afternoon is the fact that the demands of the UN Human Rights Council resolution passed in October 2015 are not yet being fully implemented. The progress being made by the Sri Lankan Government is too slow. Many of the public statements made by senior Government figures are directly contrary to the demands of that resolution, particularly in respect of international involvement in the prosecution of historical alleged war crimes.

That resolution set out judicial and non-judicial measures needed to advance accountability, reconciliation, human rights and the rule of law. It was very encouraging that the Sri Lankan Government co-sponsored that resolution and that it passed unanimously. Although the resolution did not go as far as many of us would have wanted, the compromise was worth while, in binding the Sri Lankan Government to that resolution. That is why we must make sure that it is delivered to the letter.

Although it should be acknowledged that some initial progress has been made, with the release of civilian land and the establishment of an office of missing persons, the update produced by the Human Rights Commissioner last month shows that there is still much more progress to be made if the resolution is to be met and justice is to be obtained. Much more needs to be done to speed up efforts to investigate missing persons and to provide confidence to their families that the search is serious. The UN working group on enforced or involuntary disappearances ranks Sri Lanka as the country with the second highest number of disappearances in the history of its tenure.

The Sri Lankan Government must also do more to improve transparency and communication in relation to their consultations, having promised to engage in broad terms in national consultations and created a consultation taskforce on reconciliation mechanisms in February 2016. Progress in this area has again been slow. The taskforce has not yet begun regional consultations, which, given the nature of the geography and the demography of Sri Lanka, are absolutely essential, and the UN special rapporteur on transitional justice has criticised the process. Indeed, there are many people in the diaspora, including those in my constituency and, I suspect, in other constituencies, who want their voices to be heard and who also deserve to have their say in the consultation process.

It is also worth noting that those consultations that have taken place, for example on the creation of the Office for Missing Persons, have been short and their

findings not shared with the public. Instead, in this particular case, they were shared only with a small number of civil society groups, which were given just two weeks to respond. Given the gravity of the issues being discussed, that is wholly unsatisfactory.

The delay in the implementation of the UN Human Rights Council resolution has to be addressed if confidence in the process is to be maintained. This afternoon, there are three key areas to which I wish the Minister to respond. First, there is the issue of international involvement in the prosecution of war crimes. Despite agreeing to

“the importance of participation in a Sri Lankan judicial mechanism, including the special counsel’s office, of Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defence lawyers and authorised prosecutors and investigators”,

public statements have been made by the President and the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka stating that the judicial process will be domestic with no foreign or international involvement, which is wholly unacceptable. It is completely contrary to the resolution that was passed and the resolution that the Governor of Sri Lanka set up.

**Anne McLaughlin** (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this really important issue to the House. Does he agree that we cannot accept the Minister saying that we will not push for international involvement because, after all, the President today may be better than the President before, but President Sirisena was still part of Rajapaksa’s Government when he bombed innocent people who had done absolutely nothing to deserve it? I just want to add my voice to push for that.

**Wes Streeting:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady.

The international involvement is important for two key reasons. First, the framework for the prosecution of war crimes as serious as these simply does not exist in Sri Lankan law. The judicial mechanism needed to prosecute such serious crimes simply does not exist. The second reason is about confidence. Tamil people in Sri Lanka, in this country and in other countries around the world must have confidence that there will be a fair and due process, that the courts are properly equipped to prosecute crimes of this nature, and that the people who were responsible are properly held to account. Without not just the truth, but the justice, the reconciliation will not follow, and that would be an absolute travesty for a country that has so much promise and a potentially bright future ahead of it after such a dark and devastating conflict.

I hope that we will bring appropriate pressure to bear on the Sri Lankan Government to reverse this stance and that we will work with the international community to ensure that agreements are honoured. Will the Minister tell me what representations the UK Government have made to the Sri Lankan Government on this issue, and what steps our Government will take with our international partners to increase pressure in this area? I know that the Minister is familiar with these issues. He has recently returned from Sri Lanka and is optimistic about the progress that is being made, but he must be firm with the Government of Sri Lanka and say that our bilateral relationship would be damaged if they do not honour the commitments that were made at the UN Human Rights Council, bearing in mind that the Prime Minister was heavily criticised, particularly by Labour Members,

when he chose to visit Sri Lanka as part of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. He visited the north and met the Tamil community. Although I had misgivings at the time, it is only fair to acknowledge that the Prime Minister’s visit did shine a spotlight on the issues and helped us to apply pressure, but that visit will have been in vain if we do not see progress. I hope that, before he leaves office, the Prime Minister can bring some pressure to bear on the matter and that his successor will do the same.

I also want to raise the allegations of ongoing human rights abuses. It is simply unacceptable that, despite agreeing to the UN Human Rights Council resolution and the public statements made on this issue, we are still hearing about cases of torture, illegal detention and sexual violence. Human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the International Truth and Justice Project in Sri Lanka have all raised concerns about recent abuses and a lack of progress in this area. The charity, Freedom from Torture, has also produced evidence of the torture of Tamils occurring in 2015, including after resolution 30/1 was passed. The all-party parliamentary group for Tamils has not yet seen any evidence that these allegations have been investigated.

More recently, we learned that Velauthapillai Renukaruban, a British citizen of Tamil descent who visited the country to get married, was beaten and imprisoned on false charges. We must not allow British citizens to be treated in that way. Where these abuses take place, we must use every bit of our diplomatic muscle to ensure that British citizens are protected—never mind the fact that Tamil people who do not have the British citizenship also deserve to go about their lives with dignity and freedom.

With those worrying cases in mind, will the Minister inform us of the action he is taking to make it clear to his counterparts in the Sri Lankan Government that these abuses cannot be allowed to continue? Will he also inform the House what funding arrangements the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has in place to promote human rights abroad and how much of those funds is spent on Sri Lanka and for what purpose?

Many members of the Tamil community have raised with me the issue of deportations from the United Kingdom to Sri Lanka. When a person reaches the United Kingdom as an asylum seeker, we must do all we can to make sure that they are treated with respect and dignity. It is clear that the UK Government must look again at their policy in respect of Tamil asylum seekers. The ongoing human rights abuses and the evidence of torture of political dissidents in Sri Lanka should be a wake-up call that this issue must be treated with more seriousness than has been the case recently, particularly by giving more weight to the risks to individuals.

With this in mind, will the Minister ensure that he has further discussions with the Home Office to underline the dangers that people may face if they are returned to Sri Lanka? Will he provide an update on policy in this area, given that the UN Committee Against Torture expressed concerns about this issue nearly three years ago, in 2013?

We in this House should not forget our duty to help those in need. We should remember that this issue continues to affect the lives of people living in the UK and around the world. Many of them have seen horrific

[*Wes Streeting*]

acts of abuse take place against friends and family or have been the victims of unspeakable crimes themselves. Human rights, the rule of law and reconciliation must be given the full weight and backing of the international community to force the Sri Lankan Government to speed up their work in this area.

In this week, when the UK has had to reflect on the devastating impact of a botched intervention in Iraq, it is worth reflecting on the consequences of failing to act when human rights abuses occur. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that, during the 26 years of the Sri Lankan civil war, as people were being brutalised and tortured in the most appalling ways, the international community chose to look the other way. The House must also reflect on our failure and this country's failure in looking the other way and failing to act when we arguably could and should have done more.

We cannot turn back the clock, but we can make sure today that we do not fail all the peoples of Sri Lanka again in the future as we have done in the past. With that hope, I hope that the Minister will rise to the Dispatch Box and assure us that the Government will do all they can to ensure that truth justice and reconciliation lead to the bright future for all the peoples of Sri Lanka that we all want to see.

5.18 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I genuinely congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford North (*Wes Streeting*) on securing this debate and on his continuing commitment to the all-party parliamentary group for Tamils and its valuable work in maintaining the focus on human rights in Sri Lanka and on Tamil rights in particular. I also thank all hon. Members for their contributions, and I will try to address as many of their points as I can in the time available to me.

This debate comes at an historic time for Sri Lanka. Last October, President Sirisena's Government took the significant step of co-sponsoring Human Rights Council resolution 30/1. In his update to the Human Rights Council last week, High Commissioner Zeid recognised where progress has been made, identified where more could have been done and set out the need for a comprehensive strategy to make further progress. I fully agree with his assessment.

The Sri Lankan Government's response demonstrated their commitment to addressing the legacy of conflict. Foreign Minister Samaraweera set out to the UN Human Rights Council on 29 June what his Government would be doing to fulfil the commitments they made in Geneva last October. Their approach addresses the core issues that have marred Sri Lanka's history and scarred its society: human rights, reconciliation and transitional justice. I welcome the Government of Sri Lanka's determination and commitment to deal with these complex and sensitive issues in a comprehensive and systematic way.

We should not, however, underestimate the challenges of dealing with the legacy of a 30-year conflict. Foreign Minister Samaraweera said last week in Geneva:

"Reconciliation does not happen overnight. It requires effort, hard work, commitment, and careful, continuous, concrete action. It is a journey that requires constant striving."

I wholeheartedly agree. We should remember that Sri Lanka has been on a remarkable journey in the last 18 months, since President Sirisena was elected. The country is, I believe, now in a far better place than anyone could have imagined.

I have spoken before about the striking differences between the Sri Lanka I saw in November 2013 and the one I visited in January this year. The elections last August were the most democratic in living memory, and resulted in the formation of a national unity Government committed to reconciliation and peacebuilding. The constitutional reform process Sri Lanka has now embarked on is an essential foundation for the country's future stability—a foundation on which to build its democracy, its development and its political reconciliation. The devolution of political authority that the authorities are seeking to enshrine within that process will be crucial for Sri Lanka's long-term governance and prosperity.

The hon. Gentleman emphasised the need for Sri Lanka to make timely progress on its commitments. At the Human Rights Council session on 29 June, the UK urged Sri Lanka to deliver on those commitments, including by putting in place credible transitional justice mechanisms underpinned by meaningful consultations and effective witness protection. In that respect, we welcome the Government's announcement that they will establish an Office of Missing Persons. We remain committed to the full implementation of resolution 30/1, and we stand ready to support the Sri Lankan Government to that end.

Although progress has been slower than we and many others had hoped, it has been encouraging to see Sri Lanka's renewed openness and engagement with the UN. We welcomed Sri Lanka's invitations to High Commissioner Zeid and various UN special rapporteurs to visit and to discuss torture, disappearances, and the independence of judges. However, we recognise that much remains to be done, in particular in improving the rights of all the country's citizens.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of allegations of ongoing human rights abuses. We have been clear with the Sri Lankan Government about the need to do more. I discussed our concerns with High Commissioner Zeid in Geneva last month, and again with Foreign Minister Samaraweera in London last week. I set out clearly the areas we felt were important for Sri Lanka to focus on: torture, land reform and transitional justice.

**Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab):** Did the Minister have the opportunity to discuss with the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister this week's announcement that Sri Lanka intends to demilitarise by 2018, which would be a very welcome step? As the Minister will know, the Sri Lankan military is involved in running everything in the north from beauty parlours to hotels to food companies, and dealing with that is an important part of putting the north back on a stable footing.

**Mr Swire:** The hon. Lady makes a very credible point. I have been to the north twice and seen that for myself. An army has no reason to be in business in a civilian structure or to be on other people's land, and I will come to that in just a minute.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our funding arrangements to promote human rights abroad. Our £6.6 million three-year conflict, security and stabilisation

funding for Sri Lanka focuses on reform, interfaith dialogue—the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), with his ongoing support for Christian communities around the world, will be pleased to hear that—transitional justice, de-mining and anti-corruption. Through the Magna Carta fund and our bilateral programme budget, we are also supporting a number of other human rights and reconciliation projects. Our programmes in Sri Lanka aim to strengthen democratic institutions, support reconciliation and protect human rights.

On land reforms, which the hon. Lady just raised, more land returns are essential, both to build confidence and to allow the resettlement of displaced Tamils. I was encouraged that a further 701 acres were released two weeks ago, and that Foreign Minister Samaraweera has said that the Government have instructed the military to release all land obtained from civilians by 2018. The British Government are clear that land releases must be accompanied by adequate housing and support for resettled communities. We continue to support de-mining programmes, one of which I have seen, and housing and resettlement through our contributions to multilateral agencies.

We will continue to encourage the Government of Sri Lanka to prioritise the reform of their security sector, not least with the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. All forms of sexual and gender-based violence and torture must be addressed. The President has taken steps to address this and has issued guidance to all security forces that emphasises the absolute prohibition of torture or other ill-treatment, including sexual violence. The Government, with our assistance, are also putting in place training programmes for the police and other measures aimed at combating and eliminating torture. This includes addressing the need for the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators.

There are other areas of concern. These include issues of freedom of speech and movement, the remaining detainees held under the Prevention of Terrorism Act and the continued involvement of the military in commercial life in the north. Through diplomatic pressure and targeted projects, we will continue to encourage the Government to address these issues.

The hon. Member for Ilford North highlighted the issue of international involvement in the prosecution of

war crimes. The British Government have always been clear that any accountability mechanism needs to be credible and meet international standards. We therefore welcomed Sri Lanka's co-sponsorship of UNHRC resolution 30/1. We have reiterated our commitment to its full implementation on a number of occasions, most recently in Geneva last month.

**Wes Streeting:** Very briefly, will the Minister give his reaction to the remarks of the President and the Prime Minister in refusing to implement those aspects of the resolution specifically about international involvement in the prosecution of war crimes?

**Mr Swire:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman that to reassure the communities in Sri Lanka and to show the international community that this is a credible process, there needs to be an international element. That is what we continue to stress with the Government, with Ranil Wickremesinghe, the Prime Minister, with Mangala Samaraweera, the Foreign Minister, and through Prince Zeid. I am hopeful that the message is getting through and think that something will happen in that respect.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the asylums return policy; this is important. The Home Office country information and guidance on Sri Lanka was updated in May 2016, and we will have further discussions with the Home Office on these issues.

The United Kingdom remains committed to supporting Sri Lanka to take further steps towards peace and prosperity for all its citizens. We do so in a spirit of friendship and co-operation, and I am proud of the role that the UK continues to play. That includes, as the hon. Gentleman was generous enough to say, the visit to the north of that country by the Prime Minister during CHOGM, which I believe began to unlock this process. There are many challenges ahead and progress may be slower than some of us would hope, but we will continue to build on the good work done so far and help Sri Lanka stay the course, for the benefit of all its people.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Thursday 7 July 2016

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Blood Cancers

1.30 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered blood cancers and the Cancer Drugs Fund.

It is always a pleasure to come to this Chamber and have the opportunity to expound on the subjects that we bring here for consideration. I am pleased that so many hon. Members have made the effort to attend on a Thursday afternoon—often referred to as the graveyard shift. I am not sure that is entirely accurate or fair, but we thank very much those who have made the effort to be here. It is also a pleasure to see in her place the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), and I look forward to hearing the Minister. He and I always seem to be in these debates—if he is here I am here, and if I am here so is he—but it is always a pleasure to see him. We look forward to his response to the points that we make during the debate.

Cancer is a massive issue. It will affect one in every two people we meet, and many of us here have a personal interest in the subject. More and more people are surviving cancer because of the incredible work that has been done by the pharmaceutical industry and private enterprise, and also because of the work done in partnership with universities. Queen's University Belfast is involved in finding new drugs and working with private enterprise, the Government and the education system to find ways of doing more.

The fact that more people are surviving and living longer is to be celebrated, but unfortunately not everyone is living well, which is what this debate is about. That is especially true for people with blood cancers, many of whom will live with the disease and the consequences of its treatment for many years. Some of them are fortunate to do so, but for many that will be time limited. About one in four people living with or beyond cancer face disability or poor health following their treatment. Evidence from Macmillan shows that by 2020 nearly one in every two people will receive a cancer diagnosis in their lifetime. Just look round this Chamber: half the people here today will receive a cancer diagnosis at some time during their life; or, if they are not affected directly, their families certainly will be.

I place on the record my thanks to the cancer charities, Marie Curie Cancer Care, Macmillan Cancer Support and the many others, which do such marvellous work with those who have cancer. Right now, routine follow-up care for people with cancer costs about £250 million a year. It is usually delivered via a one-size-fits-all medical model that is based on repeat out-patient consultations despite a lack of evidence to show that that is effective, so we must also look at that.

I was therefore pleased to see the commissioning guidance released recently to promote the roll-out of a recovery package for everyone with a cancer diagnosis. The recovery package will be especially important for patients with blood cancers, because it will mean that they get the physical, emotional and social support they need to lead as healthy and active a life as possible for as long as possible. Every one of us in this Chamber would wish that to happen. Many people with blood cancers live for a number of years with the consequences of their disease and treatment, so there needs to be a commitment from the Department of Health that everyone with a blood cancer will be offered tailored support.

Let me talk from a personal point of view. My father had cancer on three occasions. He passed away last year. He did not die because of cancer, but he was diagnosed 39 years ago—38 years before he passed away—and my mother was told to go home and prepare and get the estate sorted out. In other words, there was next to no hope, but my dad survived, and he survived for three reasons. He survived, first, because of his faith and the prayers of God's people; secondly, because of the skill of the surgeon's knife; and thirdly, because of the care of the nurses. Those three things are vital for all of us. That is an example of how far we have come in those 39 years.

Patients with blood cancers can face significant problems in accessing vital treatment because of the difficulties and complexities of appraising medicines in this area. I thank the charities and others who have given us background information. I will not do this of course, but I could probably speak for three hours on this subject. I am sure that people are thinking, "Well, I hope he doesn't." I am not going to, because clearly I want to give everyone an opportunity to participate in the debate.

The appraisal system used by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is not suitable for assessing medicines that treat conditions with small patient populations—in other words, cancers that affect a small number of people. Perhaps in the greater scheme of things, they are numerically small, but it is vital that the drugs are available and in place.

At this point, I pay special tribute to the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), the chair of the newly brought together all-party group. I thank him for going with me to the Backbench Business Committee to ask for this debate. We are both pleased to be able to have the debate so early after the launch of the APPG. The hon. Gentleman will speak himself, but it is a pleasure to work alongside him.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this very important debate. The issue of small populations and finding the right treatments is crucial as the cancer drugs fund goes forward within the NICE context. That is an opportunity as well as a threat. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will reflect that in the rest of his speech.

**Jim Shannon:** It is always a pleasure to have the hon. Gentleman come along to a debate in support. He always does so, and his valuable contributions are always appreciated by us all. I wholeheartedly agree with him.

[*Jim Shannon*]

The way the system fails blood cancer patients can be illustrated via the case of ponatinib, a drug designed to treat chronic myeloid leukaemia patients who are resistant to or intolerant of other treatments. I will elaborate on this point later, for it is very important. I think that the hon. Gentleman has grasped that it is a vital issue as well. The drug is fully available to all CML patients in Scotland and Wales, but in the remainder of the United Kingdom it is provided on the NHS only to a small subset of patients who can benefit from it after NICE refused to appraise it because of the small patient population. One of the questions that we would like answered in this debate if possible—I am not sure whether the Minister is the right person to answer it, but I know that if he is not, he will certainly direct it to the right Department—is how we ensure that there is not a postcode lottery when it comes to the allocation and availability of cancer drugs.

**Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. Does he agree that parents—in my case, the parents of nine-year-old Charlie Fearn—are confused, distressed and dismayed that they are not provided with the medical intervention that they need to treat their child's illness? Charlie needs chimeric antigen receptor T-cell therapy, but Mr and Mrs Fearn are having to find as much as £150,000-plus to fund the therapy themselves. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that that extra burden, in their circumstances, is far too onerous?

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for that personal story. I think that that situation is a disgrace. Any of us in the House would wholeheartedly agree with him. There has to be a system that enables all the people of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to partake of, use and access these drugs. The example he gives shows just where the current system falls short. This debate gives us an opportunity to highlight that and to seek the solutions that he and his constituents want.

The situation with ponatinib has resulted in the equivalent of a postcode lottery in patient access across the UK, with some patients having to move to Scotland or Wales to undergo treatment. Why should they have to move? It is not fair that they should. It seems grossly unfair that they should have to either move or travel to the hospital. For these patients, the drug could be an alternative treatment to a stem cell transplant, and a last chance of survival.

The systems of appraisal used to assess blood cancer medicines need to be able to take into account the small patient numbers and the issues that that raises about the amount and maturity of data available, to ensure that all patients who need access to medicines do not miss out because of where they live.

Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia is the most common type of leukaemia, a cancer of the white blood cells. In leukaemia stem cells start to overproduce white blood cells that are not fully developed; in CLL, these are called lymphocytes. Figures from Macmillan and NICE estimate that some 2,700 to 3,200 people in the UK are diagnosed with CLL each year, with most cases occurring in people over 60 and very few in people under 40.

Around two thirds of the diagnoses are made by chance through a routine blood test with doctors; people do not know they have it and all of a sudden they find out they do. The other third of diagnoses are made following visits to the doctor for CLL-related symptoms: enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver or spleen, anaemia, bruising or fever, drenching night sweats and/or weight loss of greater than 10%. Someone with any of those symptoms should see their doctor, and do so soon.

CLL is more prevalent in men, with recent studies showing that some of the risk of developing it is inherited from parents. One in 20 CLL patients has a relative with CLL or a very similar condition; however, CLL can and does affect anyone.

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** I commend my hon. Friend for raising this issue today. In Northern Ireland three people every day are diagnosed with blood cancer. I am sure he would agree with commending the work of Leukaemia & Lymphoma NI, the only charity in Northern Ireland dedicated to dealing with this, and the great support it gives to the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology at Queen's University, which he has already mentioned. Without the dedicated work of people in charities like that across the country, raising money for absolutely vital research, we would be in a much poorer place indeed.

**Jim Shannon:** I am indebted to my right hon. Friend and colleague for that intervention. We have done, and we continue to do, many great things in Northern Ireland in medical research, charitable giving and charitable operations. He has rightly highlighted an organisation in Northern Ireland that does just that. It is worrying that we have so many people with blood cancer. When we take that as a proportion of a nation of 1.8 million, it gives an idea of just how important it is.

CLL tends to develop very slowly with many people not requiring treatment for months or even years, although others need it straight away. For all stages of CLL, more than 40%, of men and more than 50% of women will survive for five years or more after being diagnosed. At stage A, which is the earliest, people survive on average for 10 years or more after diagnosis, those at stage B for five to eight years, and those diagnosed at stage C live for up to three years. From those figures, life expectancy is very clear: people have a diminished lifespan.

Doctors often recommend against immediate treatment for CLL if it is diagnosed at an early stage and opt to watch and wait. I am concerned that sometimes they need to be more proactive and receptive to what the issues are at the time. "Watch and wait" can be stressful for those diagnosed and their families, but early treatment can lead to exposure to the side effects of drugs without achieving significant benefits, as well as to increased life insurance premiums. Sometimes we have to look at the other things that affect us when our health declines, such as work and financial obligations, or how to feed our family. That adds to the stress.

Patients whose CLL relapses early have a more aggressive form of the disease and it is essential that clinicians have a range of treatment options available to suit individual patient need. That is due to factors such as the variable course and nature of the disease, the toxicity profile of the therapies and the comorbidities, which are more prevalent in this situation. There is a general poor

understanding of the need for a variety of treatment options. Again, knowledge of the blood cancers among GPs, the NHS, consultants—those who should know—perhaps needs to be improved as well.

Stakeholders including the CLL Support Association, which has done great work collecting much of this information, have two key areas in which they have workable recommendations to make a difference. For post-diagnosis support the CLLSA believes that because CLL behaves in such a diverse way, it is important that patients and their families are provided with accurate information from trusted sources. Each hospital should have a CLL nurse who can provide patients with useful written information that contains links to websites for those who wish to know more.

Let us be honest: people who get this diagnosis want to know as much about the disease and the problems that they have right away; they want to have that knowledge and information right there. As the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) said, citing the personal experience of his constituents, they want to know what it means, how to react, what the survival chances are and how long. All those things play upon the mind; they are very important issues.

When it comes to access to new treatments, a second preliminary decision from NICE in June 2016 has provisionally rejected ibrutinib for NICE guidance to treat relapsed refractory and 17p deletion or TP53 mutated CLL. That group of patients have a poor prognosis and very few options available to them. The manufacturer has been requested to submit a proposal for consideration of CDF listing for access to treat adults for the 17p deletion or TP53 mutation only. Again, that is something that perhaps the Minister can reply to. When people see that they can access new treatments, which really could be life-saving, they want to have them right away and want to try them. In many cases, people probably would not mind piloting those things, just to make sure that they can have life expectancy on the timescale they have been given.

The CLLSA feels that ibrutinib should be made available to both groups because both populations share a number of similarities in patient need, including a significant symptom burden, limited alternative treatment options, and subsequently poor survival prospects. As both groups have a similar symptom burden, it is unfair that they will be unable to benefit from access to this treatment. There are also the quality of life benefits. CLLSA argues that the quality of life benefits reported by patients have not been adequately considered by NICE. As such, the cost-effectiveness of ibrutinib is likely to have been underestimated. Many of us believe—in the background information—that it certainly is a drug that could do more if there was the opportunity. We need to make sure that it can be made available and accessible.

Furthermore it should be noted that CLL is a heterogeneous disease, so there is a need for multiple options in every situation. I know that each person's individual circumstances are different and the GP and consultant who look at that will decide the way forward. Some patients may not respond to, be unable to tolerate or be otherwise unsuitable for alternative treatments such as idelalisib. As such, there is a clear need for access to ibrutinib to enable patient and clinician choice, so that treatment can be tailored to patients' individual

clinical needs. Ultimately the decision will remain a matter for NICE, but this is what the key stakeholder in CLL believes to be the way forward. That is an organisation that has been run by trustees who are all volunteers and either suffer from CLL, are clinicians or are relatives of those with CLL. They do their research, not for glory or riches, but for what is best for those affected.

Some of the background information we had relates to brentuximab—I hope my pronunciation is right. That is hailed as one of the most effective single agents for relapsed anaplastic lymphoma—or Hodgkin's lymphoma as it is better known. It was delisted after two of its indicators were removed, making it harder for some patients to receive the medicine they need. In November 2015, the Blood Cancers Alliance met the Secretary of State for Health and in a letter to the Prime Minister expressed its concern over the delisting of life-saving drugs from the CDF. There is a drug that was delisted and that seemed to be doing the job; it is concerning that it has been removed when it quite clearly could have made a difference.

It was greatly encouraging to have so many stakeholders engage on this issue and time will not permit me to pay tribute to all of them. Another organization working in the field is Celgene, which has provided some further information that will add to the debate. Five conditions account for almost 70% of the total lives lost to blood cancer: myeloma, diffuse large B-cell lymphoma, acute myeloid leukaemia, myelodysplastic syndromes and the aforementioned chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. New treatments have transformed survival rates for multiple myeloma since the 1970s and there have been great steps forward. I know that when the Minister responds he will tell us some of the good things that have happened, but average life expectancy for a patient diagnosed with multiple myeloma is still only five years. This debate gives us the chance to discuss the issue and get some direction and focus from the Minister on how we move forward and achieve a better, longer life for those with blood cancers.

Continued progress is only possible with continued research and investment. That is critical to achieving progress in the treatment of blood cancers. We have had many debates in Westminster Hall on rare diseases because we acknowledge the need to focus on rare diseases, and today's debate is an example of that. The numbers of people who fall into the category of having rare diseases are small, but we must not ignore the burden of their despair and what that means.

Many of the molecules in other companies' pipelines are being studied in combination with Celgene's treatments. Ceasing access to those treatments will seriously hinder progress in increasing survival rates and limit future innovation. I know that the Minister, like everyone in this Chamber today, is totally committed to finding new drugs that can cure these life-threatening diseases, as I am sure he will make clear in his response. The point is that a balance needs to be struck between regulation protecting people and allowing innovation.

In conclusion, I am pleased to have the opportunity to express in this Chamber my concern on behalf of those with blood cancers. I thank all hon. Members who have come to participate. Our responsibility as elected representatives is to put the case on behalf of our constituents. I believe we have the opportunity to make a difference for those who many years ago would

[Jim Shannon]

not have a long life, but who today could have a longer life if they had access to the cancer drugs fund. What we have in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is people with fantastic brains who have the ability to come up with new medications and who can make these things happen. I look forward very much to the Minister's response.

1.52 pm

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I feel I should start by making a confession: I am probably one of the few Members of Parliament who can look down a microscope at a blood sample and identify a blood cancer, whether it is a chronic or acute leukaemia, lymphoma or a myeloma. I began my working life as a biomedical scientist in haematology. All the hon. Members present will be relieved to know that the majority of blood samples we look at in a haematology lab are normal. However, it is that rare, abnormal blood sample with odd-looking white cells that has long-lasting and life-changing consequences for patients.

As we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), blood cancers account for one in 10 of all cancers, so they are quite prevalent. So often the patient finds it hard to grasp that they have such a serious condition. Patients diagnosed with lung cancer, breast cancer or colon cancer, for example, understand the word "cancer". But leukaemia, whether chronic, acute, myeloid or lymphoid, does not have the word "cancer" attached to it, so the move towards calling these conditions "blood cancers" may help patients and their families to come to terms with the diagnosis and focus on the need for more research and development and funding for new drugs and treatment therapies.

Stem cell transplantation is one treatment that I want to talk more about today. Just last week I visited the Anthony Nolan research labs in north London—it seemed quite strange putting on a lab coat again after so many years. Obviously technology has changed since I was in the labs, but it was still amazing to see the world-leading equipment and ground-breaking technology and all the scientific research going on behind all the new technologies being developed. The treatment being carried out there is really cutting-edge. I make no apology for using those descriptive words: we really have a gem on our doorstep. We need to sing and dance about the Anthony Nolan research labs, and there are so many more research labs throughout the whole of the UK, as well as the charities and authorities that support them.

Stem cell transplantation is a curative therapy for blood cancer. Despite the great progress that has been made in recent years, sadly one in three patients do not survive their first year after a stem cell transplant. Only half survive to five years post-transplantation, despite all the advances that are being made. Stem cell transplantation is a complex and high-risk treatment and there is an urgent need for significant improvements in transplant outcomes.

There is definitely a need for further research into stem cell transplantation to reduce the side effects of treatment and to improve the long-term survival that we really need. I believe that doing more research will lead to cost savings for the NHS, as patients will be less

likely to require specialist care following transplant, but there are a number of barriers to this type of research taking place, such as inadequate research infrastructure and inadequate data collection.

Patient outcomes can be significantly improved through more research into this type of technology. I am sure that some of the current barriers to research can be overcome with Government support for improving research infrastructure. As part of that, we need to establish and really put on the map a national stem cells transplantation trials network to bring together all the data from across the country as well as the data coming to Anthony Nolan. Hopefully, that should accelerate the adoption of new treatments in clinical practice and ultimately improve patient outcomes.

Just a couple of years ago, the Anthony Nolan research labs invested in a new technology for advanced tissue typing, known as third generation sequencing—that is where it really went beyond me on my visit there. The technology allows entire genes to be sequenced in one go, and it is faster and more accurate than was previously possible. In turn, it allows for the best possible donor for patients with blood cancer, leading to better outcomes and reducing post-transplant complications such as graft-versus-host disease.

Sadly, not every patient with blood cancer is suitable for a stem cell transplant, and even if they are, a match may not be available. For some patients, a stem cell transplant is the only suitable option, one example being patients with chronic myeloid leukaemia, a condition the hon. Gentleman touched on. Some of these patients are resistant, or develop resistance during treatment, to targeted drugs called tyrosine kinase inhibitors. Resistance to those targeted drugs is a significant problem in up to a third of patients with chronic myeloid leukaemia.

These complexities only add to the need to improve access for patients to the cancer drugs fund. Chronic myeloid leukaemia patients who are resistant to tyrosine kinase inhibitors and are not suitable for stem cell transplant need a number of medicines to be available to them. Those targeted therapies treat small patient groups and as such have been difficult for NICE to evaluate because, again, we do not have the numbers to get the evidence to prove that a drug works.

The therapies have been passed to the cancer drugs fund panel for consideration, but even now access is restricted and they have only been allowed for some patients with specific mutations. As we have heard, that is contrary to decisions in Scotland and Wales. In fact, like the hon. Gentleman, I have heard of a chronic myeloid leukaemia sufferer moving to Wales to be able to access the treatment that provides his only hope of survival for a few more months and years to spend with his family.

By the nature of the condition, blood cancers are diverse, and just a small range of approved cancer drugs or treatments does not provide a solution. It therefore follows that data on the effectiveness of the drug regime on offer are limited. This situation should not prejudice those blood cancer patients whose cancer epidemiology does not permit treatment with NICE-approved drugs.

I want to finish with three asks of the Minister. First, will he support clinical research that will improve outcomes for blood cancer patients and specifically the aim of establishing a clinical trials network for stem cell

transplantation? Secondly, will he ensure that the way the cancer drugs fund is administered does not put up even more barriers to blood cancer patients? Thirdly, will he ensure that the final outcomes of the accelerated access review provide a genuine speeding up of access to transformative and innovative drugs, devices and diagnostics, not just for blood cancer patients but for patients with other hard-to-treat conditions?

2 pm

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): It is a pleasure as always to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I should start by saying that I am a joint vice-chair of the new all-party group on blood cancer and a member of the all-party group on stem cell transplantation. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this important debate on blood cancer and the cancer drugs fund. I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Crawley (Henry Smith) for affording me this opportunity by securing the debate. I also thank the previous speaker, the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup). I agree with much of what she said, including about the need for more clinical research.

It is true that since its introduction in 2010, the cancer drugs fund has enabled many blood cancer patients in England to access treatments that are unavailable in the mainstream NHS. That has undoubtedly benefited and saved the lives of thousands of patients. However, it is equally true that, latterly, the CDF has also fostered a great deal of uncertainty for many blood cancer patients and their families.

Some have experienced a rollercoaster of emotions as the life-saving treatments they rely on have been made unavailable, then available and then unavailable again in a matter of a few months. That was most acute during the 2015 delisting process, which resulted in 16 indications for seven blood cancer drugs being removed from the CDF. There is considerable concern that under the new system more and more blood cancer drugs will become unavailable as the CDF moves away from being the safety net for patients that it was designed to be. That concern is reinforced by the retention of the flawed process used by NICE for assessing drugs, which has resulted in many blood cancer drugs becoming unavailable. I hope the Minister will offer assurances that blood cancer patients will be able to access the drugs they need under the new process for reviewing and appraising medicines.

We must not forget that the drugs offered through the CDF are just one of many treatment options available for patients with blood cancer. I want to turn briefly to one of those: stem cell transplantation. I intend to make a few points about the inconsistencies in care for blood cancer patients post-transplant. I declare an interest, as my husband Ian was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia in 2014 and received a stem cell transplant soon after in the same year through Anthony Nolan. I have been to its research labs, where his DNA is stored—he got a 10:10 match, so we were hugely excited about that. I was with Ian when he was told he had a life-threatening disease and also when he was told that he had been cured. I therefore know a bit about despair and hope and inconsistency. I travelled with him throughout the

journey. Although he is cured, it is a journey that is not entirely over, but the light of hope now outshines the darkness of despair in his case.

If we are to make use of the cutting-edge research that allowed his cure, we surely need to look at the inconsistencies of post-transplant care. It is vital that blood cancer patients who undergo stem cell transplants have access to the care and support they need after their transplants, as well as before and during. Currently, however, there is no long-term patient pathway and as such the provision of services varies greatly across the country, leaving vulnerable patients at the mercy of the postcode lottery, where some get very good support but others get very little.

The problem arises because the transplant period is defined as 30 days before transplant until just 100 days post-transplant. Variations in care and support occur after that period when commissioning responsibility transfers from NHS England to clinical commissioning groups. After that point there are no guidelines on what constitutes a suitable late effects service for patients and no guarantees of appropriate funding for transplant centres to deliver the care that stem cell recipients will continue to require. As such, the result is geographical variations.

Delivering the long-term care that patients need at a consistent standard across the country requires a clear and fully funded patient pathway. It is my belief, and that of Anthony Nolan, the blood cancer charity, that that pathway should cater for each patient for at least five years after transplant and look much further beyond the arbitrary 100-day figure. I hope the Minister will touch on what can be done to ensure that every patient has access to the same standard of care and support. Will he agree to meet with representatives of Anthony Nolan to discuss how best to deliver a comprehensive post-transplant pathway?

Just as consistency around post-transplant care is essential, so too is the need for consistency in the NHS's policy on second transplants for blood cancer patients. This is not a plea—I hope my husband will not need a second transplant: he is currently well, but living with the after-effects of the drugs needed to see him through this period—but unfortunately NHS England currently has no clear or consistent policy on whether it will fund second stem cell transplants for the small number of patients each year who relapse, even though there are many people alive today because of a second transplant.

Will the Minister offer his assurances that if a patient's doctor recommends a second transplant, NHS funding will be allocated to ensure that that patient has a second chance of a cure? After all, is that not why we are here today: to ensure that all blood cancer patients have access to the best treatments available for their condition—treatments that offer the best chance of a cure—whether it be a stem cell transplant, a course of radiotherapy or chemotherapy or access to medicines approved by NICE or those available through the CDF?

2.7 pm

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Walker. I pay tribute to hon. Members who have joined me on the new all-party group on blood cancer and particularly the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for

[Henry Smith]

going to the Backbench Business Committee and asking for this debate—my appreciation therefore also goes to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time today to discuss this important issue. The hon. Gentleman is an assiduous parliamentarian and we are grateful to have his wise words and commitment behind this important issue.

Many of my constituents have seen first hand, through family and friends, the real-life effects of blood cancer. We heard a powerful and personal presentation from the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) just a few moments ago. For my part, almost exactly four years ago this month my mother passed away from acute myeloid leukaemia. There will also be personal stories in the Public Gallery and beyond, so it is important to ensure that this issue is highlighted.

This morning I was pleased to see that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence approved the chronic myeloid leukaemia drug bosutinib. That is great news for patients. I hope that will not be the last such approval in the weeks and months to come. The importance of early diagnosis cannot be overestimated, not least because, by 2020, almost half the UK population will receive a cancer diagnosis during their lifetime. Although I am sure that everyone in this place is aware, it may come as a surprise to those who are not so familiar with the issue that blood cancer is the third biggest cancer killer and is made up of more than 130 different diseases, including leukaemia, lymphoma and myeloma.

It is important not to lose sight of the importance of ensuring emotional support. The management of the cancer drugs fund's list of medicines in 2015 caused additional emotional strain to some patients, their families and their support networks. Several treatments were not approved by NICE and so were unavailable to patients, and some treatments were made available through the cancer drugs fund. However, 16 of the drugs that received indications were then delisted during 2015, and two delisted medicines were reinstated on to the CDF in October 2015 after NHS England and the drug manufacturers agreed a new price.

All treatments currently on the CDF, and those that have been delisted, will be reviewed by NICE in the coming months as part of the new system for appraising cancer drugs, which could mean that the status of those drugs changes once again, causing additional uncertainty. Such change is of course welcome if the drugs end up becoming available, but the lack of permanency in such decisions is distressing for patients and those who care for them.

For those on a first-line treatment, not knowing whether the second or third-line options will be available—or, worse, knowing that they will not be available—places them and their family members in an almost unthinkable and unbearable situation. Although the revised cancer drugs fund provides up to two years of interim funding for a drug, the concern is whether that is enough time to secure the necessary data needed to make a final decision.

In helping to form the new APPG, I have been made aware of a number of concerns about the new cancer drugs fund system. First, the changes in the new incarnation of the CDF have led to confusion among patients. The old system provided a safety net for patients if a drug was delisted by NICE, but under the new system a

negative verdict from NICE means that there is no remaining safety net and the drug will be unavailable to patients, which is a significant cause of concern. Secondly, the fund previously allowed a number of drugs to be provided to NHS patients that otherwise would not have been provided. Many of the CDF drugs had previously been turned down by NICE for being too expensive, because of insufficient data due to the smallness of the patient populations they targeted or because low patient numbers made it impossible for cost-effectiveness to be assessed using NICE's standard methodology.

Thirdly, treatments currently on the CDF, and those that were previously included but subsequently delisted, will all be reviewed by NICE under the new system. As I have mentioned, such instability also causes suffering. Where patient populations are small, it can be difficult to secure the necessary data to make a successful application to NICE. Fourthly, the success or failure of the new process will depend on how NICE interacts with the pharmaceutical industry. Both sides have a crucial part to play, and flexibility is required on issues such as pricing, access schemes, the application of methodology and how clinical data are used.

Finally, the revised CDF will provide a maximum of two years' interim funding for a drug if NICE deems that further clinical data are required before a final appraisal decision can be made. The new CDF will therefore provide temporary funds while data are collected, whereupon the drug will be approved or declined by NICE. The fund is welcome in principle, but I fear that an additional two years will be insufficient to secure the necessary data to make a final decision, particularly for some of the blood cancer drugs due to be reviewed by NICE.

The UK is a world leader in blood cancer research, which is welcome. As a country, we can be proud of that work, while recognising that there is still much more to do. Work undertaken in this country has improved our understanding of blood cancer and helped to make available a number of life-saving and life-changing treatments, with many more in progress. Blood cancer research in the UK has been at the forefront of advancing precision medicine for patients, from molecular diagnostics to targeted therapies. In launching the APPG, it has been a pleasure to work alongside charities such as Bloodwise. Since its launch in 1960, Bloodwise has spent more than £500 million on blood cancer research. I pay tribute to the work it has done and continues to do.

The UK's world-leading blood cancer research not only helps those affected by blood cancer but allows a greater understanding of other cancers and has helped to develop new treatments for other diseases. It is vital that patients are able to benefit from that research. What are the Minister's views on providing a new model for appraising cancer drugs? Along with the work of the Government's accelerated access review, a long-term and sustainable system will enable patients to benefit from the innovative, life-saving drugs that are being developed.

Last month I received a written answer from the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), who has responsibility for public health, in which she referred to the Government's September 2015 announcement that, by 2020, the approximately 280,000 people diagnosed

with cancer each year will benefit from a tailored recovery package. Will the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences provide an update on that goal today?

I would be grateful for some reassurance on the following issues. Will the new process for reviewing medicines enable blood cancer patients to access the drugs they need? Will NICE give consideration to rare diseases and to drugs targeted at small patient populations, with clear guidance on how NICE will provide a fair assessment of such drugs? Will NICE, NHS England and the manufacturers be encouraged to work together effectively to ensure that drugs are made available? Will the Government consider the drugs budget in the light of the huge advances in technology and innovation that are leading to the development of many new life-saving drugs?

I am sincerely grateful to hon. and right hon. Friends for their attendance and attention today. With my friends on both sides of the House, I look forward to ensuring that the issue of blood cancers is further advanced and that awareness is increased.

2.18 pm

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I thank the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Crawley (Henry Smith) for securing this informative and timely debate. Although I might have sleepless nights at the thought that one in two people will receive a cancer diagnosis, I thank them both for driving home that point to the wider populace.

There can be little doubt that a cancer diagnosis is a daunting prospect for those affected and their families, which is why it is vital that we support them throughout their journey from detection through to aftercare. Many heartfelt examples and experiences have been detailed in today's debate, and it is clear that the support that individuals require can vary greatly. One size does not fit all, so we need a system that considers the problems from all angles. I agree wholeheartedly with the hon. Member for Strangford that everyone should be offered tailored support.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup)—I hope I have pronounced it correctly—for her explanation that we should refer to all the diseases as blood cancers. As a layman, I found it helpful. There are 130 of them, all with complex names, and having done some research for this debate, I found the names confusing. It is a good approach. Her argument about the strong need for more clinical research should be taken on board.

I was grateful to hear from the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher) about her personal circumstances. I am glad that her husband has had a positive outcome. The regional variations are somewhat disappointing; a lot more can be done. I thank the hon. Member for Crawley for his submission and for securing this debate. He drove home the fact that blood cancers are the third biggest cancer killer, and spoke about the difficulties caused by small sample sizes in providing adequate data for drug assessments. That is an important point.

In Scotland, of course, health issues are devolved, so unlike many hon. Members here today, I see only a tiny number of such cases in my casework, as they go to

MSPs instead. Our experience in Scotland is also a little different. The Scottish Government are implementing a £100 million new cancer plan to improve prevention, early diagnosis and treatment, and have reformed how the Scottish Medicines Consortium assesses drugs in order to give patients better access to treatments that can give them longer and better quality lives.

Basically, we have combined our cancer drugs fund with our rare diseases drugs fund and simply called it the new drugs fund. The amount in the fund has been quadrupled, which is a significant factor. That approach will serve as a blueprint for all cancer services in Scotland, improving the prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and aftercare of those affected by the disease.

Other initiatives include a £50 million fund over the next five years to improve radiotherapy equipment and support radiotherapy training, ensuring that everyone who would benefit from it has access to advanced radiotherapy, and £9 million over five years to support access to health and social care services during and after treatment, such as link workers to provide support in the most deprived communities. We will also invest £5 million over the next five years in reducing inequalities in screening. There are many such examples, and we can learn from one another's good practices in the different parts of the United Kingdom.

In Scotland, the Scottish Medicines Consortium considers drugs as NICE does, including worldwide evidence, and works up each drug in detail. The balance for us seems to be slightly more on effectiveness than on cost, although cost obviously remains a factor in all matters. Our impression is that, for NICE, cost would sometimes be a bigger component. Both organisations consider cost-effectiveness; as we all know, there is not an infinite pot of money.

In conclusion, although no system will ever produce a favourable result for every individual, more can always be done and we can always learn lessons from each other's systems. In that light, I suggest that Ministers consider giving NICE the power to change its decision-making process and consider new medicines more flexibly.

2.23 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): This debate illuminates an extraordinarily difficult subject: the clash between the fact that ultimately there must be constraints on NHS spending, whatever party is in power, and the desperation of cancer patients and their friends and family to obtain any drugs and treatments that will give them a few extra months of life.

The cancer drugs fund was a manifesto commitment by the Conservative party. As such, I venture to suggest, it was partly a political response to a series of terrible stories in the media about NICE—the rationing body—not allowing people access to drugs. However, it was always intended to be time-limited; the Government were clear from the beginning. Sadly, it has been overspent. In 2013-14, NHS England overspent the allocated budget for the fund by 15%, or £31 million, and in 2014-15, it was overspent by 48%, or £136 million. The overspend was partly offset by NHS England underspending against other budgets, but it also meant the deferral of some planned spending on primary care services.

[Ms Diane Abbott]

The Government's response to the fact that the cancer drugs fund was always going to be transitional is to introduce a new model. The cancer drugs fund will become a transitional fund that will only pay for new drugs until NICE carries out a full assessment of whether the drugs should be recommended for routine commissioning. After the assessment, the drug will either be approved by NICE for routine commissioning or removed altogether from the cancer drugs fund. That is clearly a horrifying and shocking reality for cancer patients and their families to face. Labour Members believe that the Government could have done more in setting up a new system.

This situation is serious. At the last count, 5,500 cancer patients and 1,750 blood cancer patients were dependent on some of the drugs that might be struck off. Although they personally will be unaffected, their successors as patients and the health professionals who care for them will be left in limbo. The Government have delisted seven of 14 drugs to treat symptoms of blood cancer, even before the CDF has published its report. The independent accelerated access review is also not complete, and the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme has come in for widespread criticism.

It is not clear—the Minister might be able to shed some light on this—whether there has been any proper evaluation of the efficacy of the existing programmes. Prolonging life and the palliative effects of such drugs are key issues, as well as—this is where I started—the relative costs of the drugs themselves. Any decisions made on the availability of drugs should be rational and transparent, taking those factors into account. Although I await the Minister's response with interest, the decisions of the CDF under this Government do not appear to meet the criteria of either rationality or transparency.

We must be honest: cancer treatment in this country is poor by international standards. We have some of the worst cancer survival rates of the advanced industrialised countries. Some of our nearest comparators are much poorer countries such as Lithuania and Estonia, which have similar if not better cancer survival rates. NICE comes in for extensive criticism, particularly from pharmaceutical companies, but the truth is that NICE, as an independent regulator that takes decisions on the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of drugs, is a model admired around the world. It is a difficult situation.

We in the Labour party want an investigation of the causes of our low cancer survival rates and a plan for Government. At this time, the whole House is waiting for the Minister to say how the Government balance issues of cost-effectiveness and the need for life-extending and palliative care. Are they satisfied that their model for phasing out the cancer drugs fund and turning it into a transitional arrangement is really the best model? What have they done to alleviate the concerns of cancer patients, their friends and family, and people who speak for the sector?

2.29 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford

(Jim Shannon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) on setting up the all-party parliamentary group and initiating this debate. It is another example of Westminster Hall providing an important forum as an adjunct to the main Chamber for hon. Members to raise specialist issues, and I welcome it hugely. I thank Members from all parties who have spoken. Again, it is an example of the House at its best, working together in a non-partisan way on an issue that our constituents want us to see is important.

While I am here, I take the opportunity to welcome the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) to her role as shadow Health Secretary. I look forward to working with her here and in the main Chamber.

I pay tribute to Bloodwise and other charities that work in the blood cancer space. Charities are playing an increasingly important role in the sector; the Association of Medical Research Charities recently released figures that show that our charities now invest more than £1.4 billion a year in medical research. That puts them above any of our UK pharma companies. Charities make a major sectoral contribution, not only with their research but by advocating on behalf of their patients, driving care pathway reform and leading and supporting integrated care pathway initiatives with NHS England. I put on record our gratitude to them for that work.

I congratulate Members on setting up the new APPG, which has a really important role to play, working with parliamentarians, Government and everybody involved in the blood cancer community, in ensuring that the voice of blood cancer patients is heard here in Westminster and that policies affecting blood cancer patients, their families and carers are patient-centred and evidence-based.

The word “cancer”, as you know Mr Walker, still strikes fear into people's hearts up and down the land. The truth is that, through extraordinary biomedical advances and treatment improvements, more than 850,000 people are now living and working with cancer. It has become a treatable condition. Some cancers are now preventable with early screening and intervention—for example, there have been stunning breakthroughs in breast cancer, which now has a full survival rate of more than 95%. But other cancers, particularly some of the rarer cancers, still strike fear into people's hearts, which is partly why I welcome this debate and the increasing number of debates in Westminster Hall on specialist and rare diseases.

Most Members present will have experienced the diagnosis of a family member or a loved one. We have heard powerful contributions from colleagues about that; I too experienced it when my sadly late mother-in-law was diagnosed with chronic myeloid leukaemia. My wife and our family had to watch the tragedy of a young, wonderful, healthy grandmother leaving us. Members have spoken with great passion about the need for us to do everything we can to speed up research and ensure that those people have not died in vain—that their experience helps others to avoid similar suffering. That is why the availability of effective drugs and other cancer treatments is so important to us all and why it drives me in my work as Minister for Life Sciences.

Let me set out how the Department views blood cancers and how they are grouped together, because that shapes our policy on research and treatment. Haematological or blood cancer is a term used to

describe a range of cancers that affect the blood, bone marrow, lymph or lymphatic system. The symptoms can be quite vague and many of them, such as tiredness, fever, lumps or an infection, are similar to those for colds or other much less serious illnesses. I repeat the exhortations of other hon. Members: if in doubt, go and see a doctor early for a check-up.

The charity Bloodwise estimates that around 230,000 people are now living with blood cancer in the UK. It is the fifth most common cancer in UK adults and the most common in children and young adults. It is the third biggest killer.

There are three main kinds of blood cancer. The first is leukaemias, which affect the white blood cells that are so vital to our immune system—the police of our blood system, if you like. Leukaemias include four main types: acute myeloid leukaemia, acute lymphoblastic leukaemia, chronic myeloid leukaemia and chronic lymphocytic leukaemia. The second kind of blood cancer is lymphomas, which affect the lymphatic system—another crucial part of our immune system that helps to protect the body from infection and disease. The two main types are non-Hodgkin lymphoma and Hodgkin lymphoma. The third kind of blood cancer is myelomas, which affect the plasma cells that produce antibodies, which help fight infections.

Across those three core groups, there are more than 130 different blood cancer conditions. Most start in the bone marrow, where blood is made; many different types of blood cells are made in the bone marrow, with the type of blood cancer depending on the type of blood cell that is affected. In most blood cancers, the affected blood cells stop developing in the normal way and become cancerous. The cancerous cells stop the blood doing what it normally does, such as fighting off infections. I am conscious that Members present are probably familiar with this, but many watching may not be, and it is important that people understand what the underlying symptoms and causes of the condition are. Common treatments are chemotherapy, radiotherapy and, in some cases, a stem cell or bone marrow transplant.

Many people throughout the country are working hard to improve cancer diagnosis, treatment and care. In particular, I draw attention to the work of some of the pioneers—Bloodwise, Anthony Nolan and Myeloma UK should all be applauded. The work of those charities is also supported by the UK's world-class scientific and academic life sciences research community, which is driving forward patient-centred research into blood cancers. Let me highlight a few groundbreaking centres that can give us all a lot of hope.

The Francis Crick Institute here in London—the flagship biomedical centre next to King's Cross—hosts Dominique Bonnet's programme. Dominique's team is studying both normal and leukaemic blood stem cell biology and has published work in developing immunotherapeutic approaches to targeting leukaemia. A number of other groups are studying the development of cancers and identifying opportunities to develop novel therapeutic approaches more broadly.

Blood cancer is a key theme behind the Medical Research Council's £30 million funding over five years for the molecular haematology unit at the University of Oxford, which I am visiting tomorrow. The unit is building on its programmes to understand the development of the blood system from the embryo through to adulthood

and how that can go awry, leading to a variety of haematological malignancies, as well as a number of other disorders.

Similar programmes in understanding the development of the blood system and the pathogenesis of blood cancers are supported by the Wellcome Trust-Medical Research Council Cambridge Stem Cell Institute, now under review at the end of its first five-year review period. The institute originally received an £8 million award over five years from the funders, with a strong push to translate those discoveries into clinical application.

The MRC centre for regenerative medicine hosts a number of programmes to improve understanding of the developmental biology of the haematological system and of stem cell compartments, how stem cells go on to make adult blood components and how that can go wrong and lead to leukaemias.

I make particular mention of the work of Professor Charlie Craddock, director of the blood and marrow transplant unit at University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, who leads the trials acceleration programme, funded by Bloodwise and supported through the National Institute for Health Research experimental cancer medicine centre funding and its clinical research network.

In the last decade, a wave of new drug and transplant therapies have been developed that offer the prospect of dramatically improving the outcomes for patients with blood cancers. It is important that we get those therapies to patients quickly, not only for the patients' own benefit but because patients' response, feedback and data drive intelligent research.

The trials acceleration programme was opened in 2011 specifically to address the vital importance of accelerating patient access to novel therapies in blood cancer. By funding a regulatory hub with the capacity to rapidly work up clinical trials of novel agents, coupled with an integrated network of research nurses at major leukaemia units throughout the UK, it has been possible to develop an internationally competitive portfolio of 17 clinical trials. Experience to date has shown that the trials acceleration programme is able to dramatically shorten the time to trial set-up: it is now routinely less than 12 months, which is a substantial breakthrough from where we were just a few years ago.

Professor Craddock tells me that, in the process, patients have accessed more than £150 million of new, potentially life-saving drugs that they would not otherwise have had access to, and vital new data concerning drug activity have been generated. The trials acceleration programme has proved itself a highly effective model for acceleration of new drug therapies, and it is partly those pioneering projects that have informed my thinking on the accelerated access review, which I will say more about in a moment.

The National Institute for Health Research, which we fund to the tune of £1 billion a year, is investing more than £4 million over five years in blood disorder research at the Oxford Biomedical Research Centre, including research into lymphoma, leukaemia and myeloma. In addition, the Department has allocated £200,000 to NHS Blood and Transplant to explore issues on the establishment of UPTAKE, a new research collaboration platform designed to work closely with the NIHR clinical research network to develop and deliver prospective clinical trials in transplant and cellular immunotherapy.

[George Freeman]

We are leading in the development of genomics to drive insights into new diagnostic and treatment methodologies. The 100,000 genomes project is assembling one of the world's largest datasets of genomic and phenotypic data, linking hospital outcome data with genotypic data from patient volunteers to provide what I have referred to elsewhere as the NASA of 21st century personalised biomedicine. The focus is on cancer and rare diseases.

This is a good day to be having this debate because just yesterday Dame Fiona Caldicott reported back to the Secretary of State and me. We had asked for her thoughts on how we get the balance right on data security consent and opt-outs so that we can harness patient and public trust in the use of data in our health service for research.

**Ms Abbott:** I listened with interest to the Minister, citing several organisations that speak up on the issue of blood cancer. I draw his attention to the African-Caribbean Leukaemia Trust, which had done a lot of good work encouraging people from the African-Caribbean community to donate blood—their chances of getting a properly matching blood donor are extremely low. The trust was founded by Beverley De-Gale and Orin Lewis, whose six-year-old son was diagnosed with leukaemia. I would not want the debate to finish without their work being mentioned.

**George Freeman:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. I thank her for it and endorse her sentiments. In several research areas important initiatives have been taken by black and minority ethnic and other communities with particular genetic predispositions. It is important that we support those initiatives, which I very much welcome.

The Genomics England programme operates on an explicit volunteer consent model. I want to take this opportunity to reassure the House that our announcement that we are dropping the care.data programme, which most colleagues would admit was not exactly an award-winning exercise in carrying public trust and confidence in data, is by no means, and should not be mistaken for, an abandonment of our commitment to a digital NHS. We are completely committed to making sure that our NHS is fit for purpose in the 21st century, which means that, in order to fulfil the most basic contract with our users, we need to have information for individual care, for system safety and performance and for research.

Raising awareness is the central issue of the motion. I assure Members that raising awareness and improving the early diagnosis of cancer, particularly blood cancers, is a priority for the Government. We absolutely recognise that earlier diagnosis makes it more likely that patients will receive effective treatments. On average, GPs in England see fewer than eight new cancer cases per year, but many more patients present with symptoms that could be cancer. In truth, we are missing huge opportunities to harness our daily diagnostic footprint for better cancer diagnosis.

In order to continue to support GPs to identify patients whose symptoms may indicate cancer and urgently refer them as appropriate, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence published an updated suspected

cancer referral guideline in June 2015, which includes new recommendations for haematological cancers in adults and children and young people. NICE noted that more lives could be saved each year in England if GPs simply followed the new guideline, which encourages GPs to think about cancer sooner and lowers the referral threshold.

Following the publication of the updated guideline, the Royal College of General Practitioners has worked in collaboration with Cancer Research UK on a programme of regional update events for GPs, to promote the new guideline. They have also worked to develop summary referral guidelines for GPs, including by introducing an interactive desk easel for them, to enable them to adopt the guideline. The *British Medical Journal* has also published summaries. In addition, NHS England's Accelerate, Co-ordinate, Evaluate—ACE—pilots are exploring new models for delivering a diagnosis more quickly and effectively, including by piloting a multi-disciplinary diagnostic centre, which we hope will be particularly effective for patients with vague or unclear symptoms.

In conjunction with the Department, NHS England and other stakeholders, Public Health England currently runs the Be Clear on Cancer campaigns, which are designed to raise the public's awareness of specific cancer symptoms and encourage people with those symptoms to go to the doctor at an earlier stage, when cancer is more treatable. Mr Walker, I know that you are a great champion of male health issues and have worked against stigma in health, and it is very often men who are slow to present and who tend to feel the stigma and take the traditional view, saying, "I'll only go when I have a real problem." The enlightened fairer sex tends to go to the doctor quicker. It is important that we remind men to be quick to go to the doctor.

**Maggie Throup:** The Minister is right to say that there are some really good promotional campaigns that raise the profile of different healthcare issues. The campaign to detect strokes early on, Act F.A.S.T., was a good one. Some of the other campaigns, such as those to raise awareness about lung and colon cancer, are also really good, but the hidden nature of blood cancers makes things harder. Does the Minister agree that we should try to raise the profile of the symptoms?

**George Freeman:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. As she has made clear, and as I repeated earlier, it is tricky because the symptoms are not always straightforward or simple. It is often not a lump or something that is easily detectable, and the symptoms can easily be confused with those of other conditions that many of us might all too easily brush off and dismiss as the result of tiredness, fatigue and the general pressures of modern life. It is important that people recognise the symptoms. The all-party group and this debate will help to underline the importance of being aware of the early symptoms.

So far there have been 11 national Be Clear on Cancer campaigns covering seven types of cancer, and a national respiratory symptoms campaign will run from July to October this year to raise awareness of lung disease. I shall obviously ensure that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for

Battersea (Jane Ellison) is aware of this debate and will make clear to her the cross-party support for greater awareness of blood cancers.

**Jim Shannon:** I am not sure whether this is the Minister's responsibility, but those of us who have participated in the debate are very aware of the issues relating to the accelerated access review. We are keen to know whether there could be a review of the scheme and of access to drugs. Even if the review were to resolve the many issues surrounding the speed with which new medicines are evaluated by NICE, unless there is meaningful change to the final decision-making process, new medicines will fail to reach patients. I suspect that is the Minister's responsibility, but he can confirm that. How can we improve the accelerated access review? I know the Minister will have a good answer and I want to give him an opportunity to share it.

**George Freeman:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for reading my mind—not for the first time—because the next paragraph in my speech is about the cancer drugs fund and the accelerated access review. His intervention gives me a moment to highlight some of the important points that colleagues have made. The hon. Gentleman, who is something of a biomedical stalker of mine on these occasions, as he acknowledged—we rarely appear in this House other than together—was right to highlight the great work that Queen's University Belfast does on blood cancers. He spoke with great passion about his father's experience.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) spoke about her experience as a haematologist in this field and about being involved on the frontline of research. That is another example of the power of having Members with a range of career backgrounds in the House. She brings great expertise to these matters.

The hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher), who is vice-chair of the all-party group, made some important points about the CDF, to which I will return, and described the experience of her husband Ian. She asked whether I would meet the Anthony Nolan Trust; I will. I have already had several meetings with the trust and will continue to meet it, and when I do, I will pick up on the issues she mentioned relating to post-transplantation care in particular.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley spoke powerfully about his mother's experience and made some really important points, not least about data and the importance of our harnessing it and generating a new model of appraisal. I will pick up on the latter point when I discuss the accelerated access review.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) discussed NICE and how important it is that we tackle the new landscape and make sure we are quicker and better at assessing new medicines. The hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington raised several important issues in a spirit of cross-party non-partisanship that I hugely welcome and appreciate.

I return to the cancer drugs fund. At the beginning of the previous Parliament, the Government, led by the Prime Minister, made the important commitment that we would put in place a cancer drugs fund to ensure that UK patients got access to the very latest cancer

drug treatments. We did that in response to a number of high-profile cases in which NICE, applying its standard, one-size-fits-all quality-adjusted life year, had turned down cancer drugs, and patients were desperate for some hope, wanting the system to be responsive to their needs.

I am proud that we have made a total commitment of more than £1 billion to the cancer drugs fund and that we are continuing to invest each year, with more than £300 million put in this year. However, the system as it was originally set up has not proved to be sustainable, because of the pressure—inevitable pressure, in some ways, given the extraordinary explosion of our medical advances—put on it. If drug companies are turned down by NICE and there is a fund available for a post-NICE approval, the companies simply go to it and it has become over-subscribed.

NHS England has moved in the right direction by taking our funding commitment and repositioning the CDF as an early access and managed-access fund that examines more innovative drugs, ensures that they are provided to patients more quickly and makes sure that the data from that early access is allowed to inform the selection of the drugs that are adopted.

The truth is that breakthroughs in 21st century drug discovery and the rise of better targeted medicines are bringing huge benefits for patients but they also place huge pressure on our traditional models of assessment, adoption and reimbursement. With a rapidly ageing society and an explosion of new treatments, we cannot continue with the old model of one size fits all, with the NHS acting as a late procurer at a retail price of every drug. At the heart of my portfolio is a mission to unleash the power of the NHS as a research partner in bringing new drugs to market and getting a dividend—a discount—in return for that work.

We spend around £14 billion on medicines in the NHS every year and over £5.5 billion of that is spent on cancer drugs. The new generation of cancer therapies are incredibly exciting. The immunotherapies that we are seeing do not just delay death or grant patients a few extra months or years; they are cures for cancer. Those *Daily Mail* headlines that have been promising cures for cancers for more than 20 years are finally true. We now have cancer cures coming through, which profoundly changes the way that we will have to price drugs.

Let me say something about the accelerated access review, NICE and the CDF. At the heart of the accelerated access review is a commitment from the Government to consider whether and how we can better harness our extraordinary NHS assets as an integrated healthcare system to become a partner in the development of new therapies, so that instead of the industry treating the NHS as an increasingly pressurised retail-based consumer that struggles with this explosion of ever more expensive technology, we become a partner. Then, in return for sharing our clinical assets, for working with charities and the industry around our £1 billion-a-year National Institute for Health Research network, and for our leadership in genomics and informatics, we can pull innovation through more quickly for patients, share a data package and be the first place on Earth that companies want to come to in order to have their innovations assessed.

[George Freeman]

The accelerated access review has been examining a whole range of complex issues in this field and its report is waiting for a post-referendum slot to be published. I can assure Members that in the time that the review team has been preparing that report for publication, I have not been sitting around waiting for it; along with NHS England, I have been doing the preparatory work to be ready for it. Without in any way wanting to pre-empt the report, let me just share with colleagues some thoughts about where I think there is a huge degree of consensus between the Department of Health and NHS England on how we might be able to make some moves.

There are three key areas. First, in specialist commissioning, which deals with many rare diseases and rare cancers, the drugs are commissioned nationally through the Department of Health and NHS England. We want to see whether we can pull together that commissioning function into a more innovative procurement unit, to pull through and do some more innovative deals with industry in return for discounts—acceleration for discounts.

Secondly, we want to consider the NICE pathways through to NHS England and ask whether we can make it easier for innovators either to go through a series of much clearer NICE pathways or to go straight to NHS England and do pricing, discounting, acceleration and volume deals, as well making sure that we have an transparency and accountability framework so that people can see which parties in the ecosystem are fulfilling their mandate.

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

The evidence from recent NICE approvals is encouraging. Many thousands of people have benefited from blood cancer drugs that NICE has recommended, such as bortezomib, ofatumumab and rituximab, and the evidence is that if we gather the data properly from the drugs that we approve, then we can use that as an intelligent health service to inform which drugs we adopt and pull through more quickly. If we get that right, the CDF in its reformatted position as a managed-access fund operating earlier in the system could become a powerful vehicle for an accelerated-access model of cancer drugs assessment. That will require some careful work on the NICE/NHS England framework, but we are doing that work right now, as we speak.

I will close, Mr Walker, by saying that—ah, Mr Walker has been replaced by you, Mr Betts.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Observant, Minister. [Laughter.]

**George Freeman:** That was achieved in an extraordinary manoeuvre, which was so seamless I did not even notice it happening over my left shoulder.

This summer, officials in the Department will work with the accelerated access review team and NHS England to try to strike a blow for an integrated healthcare innovation economy that makes best use of our budgets. Let me put it on the record that these are substantial budgets: we have committed an extra £10 billion a year to the NHS in 2020 and at the heart of that package is an extra commitment to new drugs worth £4 billion. Those are substantial sums, but we want to make sure

that those funds are spent on getting the right drugs through to the right people quickly, and in return for that acceleration we will be able to get better discounts from the industry. I am confident that by bringing the CDF together with the accelerated access review, we will be able to deal with many of the issues that colleagues have raised this afternoon.

That brings me to the end of my comments. It only remains for me to thank hon. Members for raising these issues. I hope they can rest assured that I am committed to seeing these issues through and working with them in the days, weeks, months and—who knows?—years ahead.

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** I call Jim Shannon. You have two minutes to wind up.

2.55 pm

**Jim Shannon:** It is a privilege to sum up. First, I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who have made valuable contributions today. In particular, I thank the Minister for his concluding remarks, which gave us lots of hope and comfort for the way forward. I genuinely mean it when I say that we very much appreciate his energy and his commitment to the issues that he is involved with. We know that when he says he will do things he will actually do them, and we very much appreciate that.

I thank all those Members who have made a contribution today. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and for Bootle (Peter Dowd) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) told some personal stories to illustrate the issues. In particular, my right hon. Friend referred to the charitable work that is done in England. I think that theme came through in all the contributions that were made today.

The hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) referred to the stem cell infrastructure that needs to be improved and I thank her for her very helpful contribution. She referred to the suitability of patients for stem cells and drugs, and she also referred—as we all did—to the improvement of NICE, which is very much needed. In addition, she referred to the clinical research that is also needed.

There was a very valuable, detailed and comprehensive contribution from the hon. Member for Coventry North East (Colleen Fletcher). I am so pleased to have listened to the very personal story that she told us, and what a joy it is to know that she can point to the stem cells and to how her husband's own health has improved, which in turn helps their entire family. I think that each and every one of us here today was particularly touched by that contribution. On behalf of us all, I wish her husband well. It is good to know that the Anthony Nolan trust was very much involved in his treatment, as it is in the treatment of many other people. We thank the trust for its work.

The one key comment by the hon. Lady that I wrote down during the debate was this: "Hope shines out from the darkness". She also referred to the geographical variations in treatment that exist across the United Kingdom, and to giving a second chance. How true that is.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who is the chair of the all-party group on blood cancer, also contributed today. First of all, we thank him for his

initiative for starting that group. We are very happy to be behind him. He is the general and we are the soldiers; he leads in the direction that we wish to go in. He referred to 130 blood diseases, to the emotional support that is necessary for sufferers, to his concerns over delisting, to the need to improve performance and to how NICE and the pharmaceutical industry can work together, which I mentioned in my introduction, but it is so important it deserves repeating. He also referred to Bloodwise and said that everyone needs access to the drugs that they require now.

The hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) spoke, as he always does; he never misses these debates. He always comes along and makes a very determined and considerable contribution. In many ways Scotland leads the way in what we could do in the rest of the United Kingdom. His contribution outlined what Scotland has done and the regional variations. He made many important points, but one of the ones that I thought was good—the Minister will have noticed this—was on how we can exchange our viewpoints regionally and then use the regional variations to the advantage of us all. In Northern Ireland, we can learn from what they do in Scotland and in England and Wales, and vice versa. That is important.

It is nice to see the shadow Minister in her place. She has certainly grasped her portfolio quickly. She has lots of experience, of course. We thank her for the comments she made. She referred to the evaluation of drug availability,

relative costs, the rationale, transparency, the palliative effect and the absolute cost—

**Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair):** Order. The format is for the mover of the debate to have literally two minutes to finish. I know we have got time, but there is normal procedure with this. Will the hon. Gentleman bear that in mind and come to a conclusion?

**Jim Shannon:** My apologies, Mr Betts. I did not realise that. I thought I had five minutes, and I presumed that was the case. I will bring my comments to an end.

I thank all those who have taken part. I thank the Minister for his concrete proposals and his response. My concluding point is that a single medicine for a cure takes 12 years, 1,600 scientists and 500,000 lab tests to develop. That is the importance of the work that is done. To put it into perspective, that is what we want to work towards: a cure for cancer. If we can get a cure for cancer, we will make lives better. Let us ensure that everyone in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland can benefit from that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered blood cancers and the Cancer Drugs Fund.

3.1 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 7 July 2016

## TREASURY

### Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012: Annual Report

**The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands):** The Annual Report to Parliament under the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012 for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 has today been laid before Parliament.

The report is prepared in line with the requirements set out in the Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012 that the Government report annually to Parliament on the financial assistance given under the act.

[HCWS73]

### UK Debt Management Office: Business Plan

**Harriett Baldwin:** The United Kingdom Debt Management Office (DMO) has today published its business plan for the year 2016-17. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DMO's website: [www.dmo.gov.uk](http://www.dmo.gov.uk).

[HCWS71]

### UK-Turkmenistan Double Taxation Conventions

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke):** A Double Taxation Convention with Turkmenistan was signed on 10 June 2016. The text of the Convention has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on HM Revenue and Customs' pages of the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website. The texts will be scheduled to draft Orders in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

[HCWS70]

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Neighbourhood Planning

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis):** On 11 January 2016, I extended for a period of six months the criteria for consideration of the recovery of planning appeals to include proposals for residential development over 10 units in areas where a qualifying body has submitted a neighbourhood plan proposal to the local planning authority or where a neighbourhood plan has been made (Hansard HCWS457).

I am now extending that period for a further six months from today but, in the light of the experience which has now accrued on neighbourhood planning, I intend to limit the criteria to include proposals for residential development of more than 25 units in areas where a qualifying body has submitted a neighbourhood plan to the local authority but the relevant plan has not

yet been made. This change to the criteria would not however preclude Ministers from exercising their discretion to recover any other appeal which fell outside these parameters if they considered, it appropriate under any of the criteria set out in the written ministerial statement made by Mr. Parmjit Dhanda on Monday 30 June 2008, *Official Report*, column 41 WS.

[HCWS74]

## DEFENCE

### Submarine Dismantling Project

**The Minister for Defence Procurement (Mr Philip Dunne):** Today I am announcing that Capenhurst Nuclear Services (CNS), at Capenhurst in Cheshire, has been selected as the MOD's site for interim storage of the intermediate-level radioactive waste (ILW) from decommissioned nuclear-powered submarines prior to disposal. AWE Aldermaston in Berkshire has been identified as a contingency site.

CNS will have the capability to store this ILW until it can be disposed of in a geological disposal facility, some time after 2040.

Like all the sites shortlisted, the operator CNS already manage radioactive materials, and were found to meet the submarine dismantling project's requirements best, including value for money.

There are two options at CNS to store ILW. The option that MOD will be taking forward is to use an existing facility, with a second on-site contingency option of constructing a new store.

As put forward during the public consultation, we have also selected a contingency site. Should both Capenhurst options prove unsuitable, AWE Aldermaston will then be taken forward as the MOD's preferred contingency site.

As a responsible nuclear operator the MOD takes seriously its duty to manage the submarine fleet throughout their operational service and during the disposal process. Today's announcement reiterates my commitment that this activity will be undertaken in a safe, secure, cost-effective and environmentally sound manner.

[HCWS78]

### United States Visiting Forces: Contingent Liability

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** I have today laid before Parliament a departmental minute to advise that the Ministry of Defence has received approval from Her Majesty's Treasury to recognise a new contingent liability associated with potential redundancy payments to civil servants currently located at RAF Mildenhall, RAF Alconbury and RAF Molesworth, which are scheduled for closure under the United States Visiting Forces European Infrastructure Consolidation review.

In January 2015 the United States Department of Defence communicated their decision to withdraw from RAF Molesworth and RAF Alconbury with the activities undertaken there being consolidated at RAF Croughton.

Additionally, they also announced their withdrawal from RAF Mildenhall. Currently, US plans are not yet sufficiently mature to say definitively when these stations will close.

There are approximately 470 MOD civil servants employed at these three stations. While staff will be supported in seeking to secure alternative employment in the Civil Service it is likely that some civil servants will be made redundant. The responsibility for the provision of redundancy payments is split between the UK and the US. I can advise you that Her Majesty's Treasury have agreed a contingent liability of up to £6 million.

I can assure you that all MOD civil servants who are affected by these base closures will be managed in accordance with the MOD Civil Service terms and conditions and will be provided with advice and support to make decisions about their future.

[HCWS72]

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Office for Nuclear Regulation: Annual Report

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** Later today the annual report to Parliament setting out the use of the Secretary of State's powers exercised to the Office for Nuclear Regulation during the year, will be published. This is in accordance with Section 108(1) of the Energy Act 2013.

[HCWS65]

### Committee on Climate Change: UK's Carbon Budgets

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom):** I wish to inform the House that the Government are today laying the Committee on Climate Change's (CCC) advice on the compatibility of UK onshore petroleum with meeting the UK's carbon budgets, as well as the Government's response to that advice<sup>[1]</sup>. These are being laid before Parliament in line with Section 49 of the Infrastructure Act 2015.

The CCC's report mainly focuses on shale gas extraction. The Government welcome the CCC's conclusion that shale gas is compatible with carbon budgets if certain conditions are met. We believe that our strong regulatory regime and determination to meet our carbon budgets mean those conditions can and will be met.

The Government are committed to exploring the UK's shale gas potential while maintaining the very highest safety and environmental standards. We are confident that the existing regulators have the right powers and flexibility to ensure that emissions are minimised. We will of course continue to work with the Environment Agency, the Health and Safety Executive and the Oil and Gas Authority to ensure this continues to be the case as the new shale industry grows.

Exploring and developing our shale gas and oil resources could potentially bring substantial benefits and help meet our objectives for secure energy supplies, economic growth and lower carbon emissions. We therefore welcome that the CCC shares the Government's view that shale gas could make a useful contribution to UK energy supplies.

We do not yet know the full scale of the UK's shale resources nor how much can be extracted technically or economically. There is therefore a clear need to seize the

opportunity now to determine the full potential for shale development in the UK and we support the industry's work to bring forward exploratory wells.

Having access to clean, safe and secure supplies of natural gas for years to come is a key requirement if the UK is to successfully transition to a low-carbon economy. The UK was the first country to set legally binding carbon budgets, and this Government are fully committed to them, as shown by the announcement of the fifth carbon budget level last week. We need gas—the cleanest fossil fuel—to support our climate change efforts by providing flexibility and helping us to reduce the use of high-carbon coal.

Section 49 of the Infrastructure Act requires the Secretary of State, when laying the CCC report before Parliament, to lay either regulations providing for the right to use deep-level land to cease to have effect, or a report explaining the reasoning for not doing so. The Government response explains why the Government believe that our strong regulatory regime will meet the conditions set out by the CCC, and therefore further regulations are not required. This meets the Government's obligations under the Infrastructure Act. The Act requires a further report to be provided by the CCC in April 2021.

<sup>[1]</sup> These are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/committee-on-climate-change-report-and-government-response-on-the-compatibility-of-uk-onshore-petroleum-with-meeting-the-uks-carbon-budgets>.

[HCWS66]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### June Environment Council

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** I attended the EU Environment Council in Luxembourg on 20 June along with my noble friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Lord Bourne). Roseanna Cunningham MSP also attended.

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed. *EU emissions trading system (ETS)*

The presidency introduced its progress report on negotiations to reform the EU ETS, framed in the context of the Paris climate agreement. The Commission saw carbon leakage rules as a priority and cautioned against over-burdening national authorities and industry. The Commission called for more ideas from industry on how best to use the innovation and modernisation funds, and supported a focus on addressing the surplus of allowances in the system rather than direct price regulation.

In the ensuing policy debate, all Ministers supported the presidency's progress report and proposals for next steps. The UK focused on the need to balance the reducing number of free allowances with appropriate carbon leakage support, protection of the market stability reserve, strengthening of the carbon price, and reaching agreement on ETS alongside the effort share decision.

*Paris ratification: presentation from the Commission and Council statement*

The Commission briefly presented its proposal for a Council decision on EU ratification of the Paris agreement, published on 10 June. The presidency then invited Ministers to endorse a Council statement calling for ratification of the Paris agreement by the EU and its member states as soon as possible.

Following proposals from other member states, the presidency presented a compromise statement which included references to climate finance, and which the Council agreed by consensus.

*National emissions ceilings directive: state of play*

The presidency set out the state of play of the negotiations. The presidency was disappointed agreement had not yet been reached, but noted good progress was made in the four trilogue meetings which had taken place. On the key issues of 2030 limits, flexibilities and the nature of 2025 ceilings, the institutions were still some way apart. Despite this, the presidency believed a deal was close and had been in contact with the European Parliament with a view to arranging a fifth trilogue meeting. The Commission fully supported the presidency's efforts.

The UK along with other member states encouraged the presidency to make another attempt at a first reading agreement by the end of June. However there was some difference in focus between member states in terms of ambition and the need for realistic and attainable targets. A significant number of member states expressed a clear preference for an agreement built on the most recent presidency mandate.

*AOB: NOx emissions by diesel*

The presidency reported on recent discussion at Transport Council. The Commission reiterated its view that the main issue was member state implementation of the Euro 5/6 regulations. It noted the progress made on the adoption of the real driving emissions (RDE) and worldwide harmonised light vehicles test procedure (WLTP) proposals. The Commission called on member states to accelerate negotiations on the type approval regulations. The Commission said it intended to provide further guidance on the implementation of the Euro 5/6 regulations by the end of the year, but added this had to be based on a transparent exchange of information gathered during national studies.

The UK underlined the urgent need to resolve the issue to ensure health benefits and for member states to fulfil their legal obligations.

*AOB: endocrine disruptors*

The Commission presented its recently adopted package on endocrine disruptors consisting of a communication and draft Commission acts setting out scientific criteria in the context of EU legislation on plant protection products and biocidal products.

*Council conclusions on Closing the Loop: Circular Economy*

The Council adopted by consensus conclusions which responded to the Commission communication on an EU action plan for the circular economy. The UK welcomed the conclusions and, in particular, the call for EU action on microbeads which was supported by several other member states.

*Council conclusions on illegal wildlife trafficking*

Council adopted by consensus conclusions which responded to the Commission communication on an EU action plan against wildlife trafficking. The UK intervened in support of the conclusions and called for a robust EU commitment on trophy hunting at the convention on international trade in endangered species conference of the parties in September. The UK also called for action in working towards the closure of the Chinese domestic market for ivory.

*AOBs*

The Council noted updates from the Commission on: negotiations on aviation emissions in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the outcome of which would have implications for the EU's aviation emission trading system; the outcomes of the eighth Environment for Europe ministerial conference; and the UN Environment Assembly.

The Council noted presidency updates on: April's "Make It Work" conference, an initiative which aims to improve EU regulation; April's informal Council of Environment and Transport Ministers; and the recent "REACH Forward" conference on chemicals legislation.

The Council noted information provided by: the Commission regarding environmental implementation review; the German and Belgian delegations regarding the Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans (Bsal) virus affecting salamander and newt populations; and the incoming Slovakian presidency, who informed member states of the key environment priorities for its presidency—climate change, biodiversity, waste and water.

[HCWS68]

**FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE**

**St Helena and Ascension Island: Child Safeguarding**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** On 10 December 2015, *Official Report*, column 56WS, I informed the House that the UK Government had published a report by Sasha Wass QC on allegations surrounding child safeguarding issues on St Helena and Ascension Island. The report was independent and comprehensive, and I welcomed its conclusion that no evidence had been found of corruption or cover up in the St Helena police service, the St Helena and Ascension Island Governments, the FCO or DFID.

However, the report did find evidence of systemic failings by social services and police in the past. The report made a number of recommendations in relation to child safeguarding. The Government accepted all of its recommendations, and on 29 January 2016 the FCO appointed Ms Ginny Ferson to St Helena as UK Government special representative: Wass inquiry implementation. Ms Ferson went immediately to St Helena, visiting Ascension Island en route. She established good relationships with local Government officials, police and other stakeholders and worked alongside them on implementing the Wass inquiry recommendations. This included an analysis of previous reports commissioned by the FCO and DFID to determine which previous

recommendations remained outstanding but valid. Those recommendations that remained valid but outstanding have now been implemented.

To ensure full transparency, the St Helena and Ascension Island Governments collated the recommendations of the inquiry report into a risk-rated action plan which has been published on their respective Government websites. Ms Ferson's report will be available on gov.uk.

Good progress has been made in implementing the recommendations of the inquiry report. The UK Government have increased the funding they provide to the St Helena Government for child safeguarding and for health and social care more generally, and improved co-ordinated efforts are bringing about real change. For example, Jamestown hospital is undergoing a £2.8 million refurbishment of its medical wing, due for completion by the end of July 2016. In addition, a funding uplift has enabled the rebuilding of a dedicated community nursing team and re-opening of three local health clinics. The safeguarding directorate and police service have rolled out a locally adapted version of "Working Together 2015" based on the UK model. The Ascension Island Government have done likewise. All schools now have a designated child safeguarding lead. Most recommendations have been fully implemented, others are on course to being completed. One relating to secondments to a UK police investigations team will be implemented as soon as staffing levels allow.

It is important that the improvements are sustainable and Ms Ferson includes advice on future-proofing in her report which we, alongside the St Helena and Ascension Island Governments, have taken on board.

We are determined to build on this work on child safeguarding across our territories. The FCO's child safeguarding unit has promoted the recommendations of the inquiry report throughout the overseas territories to maintain focus on continuing to strengthen child safeguarding measures. We have intensified our work with key UK departments and bodies such as the National Crime Agency, Crown Prosecution Service and social work experts, to provide additional expertise to territory Governments on improving safeguarding measures across the board.

[HCWS77]

## JUSTICE

### Cremations

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinage):** Today the Government are publishing their response to the recent consultation on infant cremations, which sought views on proposals for a number of changes to the Cremation (England and Wales) Regulations 2008, and for improving other aspects of cremation practice.

Improving infant cremation legislation and practice has been a priority for me since I joined the Ministry of Justice last year. I am therefore very pleased to publish this document which sets out the changes we plan to make.

We consulted between December 2015 and March 2016 following consideration of David Jenkins' report of June 2015 into infant cremations at Emstrey crematorium in Shropshire, and Lord Bonomy's Scottish Infant Cremation Commission report of June 2014. These reports found that ashes were either not recovered following infant cremations, or were recovered but parents were neither consulted over what should happen to their babies' ashes nor advised of the ashes' final resting place.

Such practices caused parents already grieving the loss of their baby immense additional distress. Some parents will never know what happened to their babies' ashes.

I have always made it clear that such practices should never happen again. It is my aim that the changes I am announcing today will ensure that no bereaved parent suffers in future as many have suffered in the past.

Following consideration of the responses to our consultation, we plan to make the following changes:

Introduce a statutory definition of ashes.

Amend statutory cremation forms to make sure that applicants' wishes in relation to recovered ashes are explicit and clearly recorded before a cremation takes place.

Where parents choose a cremation following a pregnancy loss of a foetus of less than 24 weeks' gestation, we will bring such cremations into the scope of our regulations, like all other cremations. I must stress that we have no plans to alter parents' current choices following a pre-24 week pregnancy loss, so parents will continue to be able to choose between cremation, burial and sensitive incineration or they can ask the hospital to make all arrangements on their behalf.

Establish a national cremation working group of experts to advise us on a number of technical matters related to our proposed reforms, such as the detail of new regulations and forms, codes of practice and training for cremation authority staff, information for bereaved parents, and whether there should be an inspector of crematoria.

Copies of the consultation response document will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The response is also available at <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/consultation-on-cremation>.

[HCWS67]

### Judicial Conduct Investigations Office: Annual Report

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove):** With the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice, I will today publish the 10th annual report of the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO), formerly known as the Office for Judicial Complaints. The JCIO provides support to the Lord Chief Justice and myself in our joint responsibility for the system of judicial complaints and discipline.

Over the past year the JCIO received 2,609 complaints and 662 written enquiries, with 43 complaints resulting in disciplinary action. A first substantive response was provided within 15 working days in 99% of all cases and regular monthly updates given to all parties in 98% of cases.

I have placed copies of the report into the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office. Copies of the report are also available on the internet at: <http://judicialconduct.judiciary.gov.uk/publications.htm>

[HCWS75]

## Legal Services Regulation

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):** My noble friend the Minister of State for Civil Justice (Lord Faulks QC) has made the following written statement.

The Government are committed to encouraging open and competitive markets. Well-functioning markets are key to the health of the economy and promote growth, innovation and efficiency. Competitive markets are also in the best interest of consumers, enabling consumer choice resulting in better and more affordable products and services.

The legal services market is not only an important contributor to the UK economy, but also to access to justice. The Government are committed to a strong, independent and competitive legal services market, which will promote consumer choice and quality services at lower prices, ensuring greater access to justice for all.

On 30 November the Government published, "A Better Deal: boosting competition to bring down bills for families and firms" which set out the Government's approach to encouraging open and competitive markets, for the benefit of the UK economy and UK consumers. A key part of the Government's approach is to ensure that the statutory frameworks underpinning regulatory regimes allow regulators to regulate in a way that is proportionate and promotes competition and innovation.

The "Better Deal" document included a pledge to consult on making changes to the regulatory framework for legal services to remove barriers to market entry, and regulatory burdens on, alternative business structures in legal services, and on making legal services regulators independent from professional representative bodies.

Today, I am publishing a consultation that seeks views on the first of these proposals. The Government intend to consider the detail and timing of a further consultation on regulatory independence, in the context of the preliminary findings of the Competition and Markets Authority study into the legal services market, which are due to be published shortly.

Since 2010, when alternative business structures were first licensed to provide legal services, over 600 ABS firms have entered the market. The introduction of ABS businesses, particularly those that have access to external investment and business and commercial expertise, has benefited the market more widely. Recent research has indicated that ABS firms are more likely to be innovative than other regulated legal services firms: <https://research.legalservicesboard.org.uk/wp-content/media/Innovation-Report.pdf>. These new, innovative providers have increased competition in the market, which we believe encourages a wider variety of legal services in the market that are more accessible and affordable to consumers.

As a result of concerns raised at the time about the potential risks of these new and unknown business models, the legislative framework for the regulation of ABS businesses, set out in the Legal Services Act 2007, is more onerous and prescriptive than that for traditional law firms.

In practice, ABS businesses have not been shown to attract any greater regulatory risk than traditional law firms and the Legal Services Board and front-line regulators suggest that the current statutory requirements act as a deterrent and an unnecessary barrier to firms wanting to change their current business model to a more innovative one, as well as to new businesses considering entering the market.

The proposals set out in this consultation aim to enable legal services regulators to reduce regulatory burdens on ABS, while taking a more effective risk-based approach to regulation.

[HCWS69]

## PRIME MINISTER

### Surveillance and Interception of Communications

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** I have today laid before both Houses a copy of the latest annual report from the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and a copy of a report by the Interception of Communications Commissioner on his oversight of directions issued under section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. Both reports provide rigorous and independent oversight and scrutiny of the use of covert investigatory powers.

The Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the right hon. the Lord Judge, was appointed in July 2015 to keep under review public authority use of covert surveillance, covert human intelligence sources and property interference powers. The Chief Surveillance Commissioner provides statutory oversight to ensure that public authorities use correctly and lawfully the relevant provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and the Police Act 1997. He heads the Office of Surveillance Commissioners (OSC) which supports him in the discharge of these statutory duties.

His annual report provides a detailed account of the way in which the OSC has provided this scrutiny, both through authorisation of deployments where prior approval of a Surveillance Commissioner is required by statute, and through a rigorous and comprehensive programme of inspections. The report also sets out the findings and conclusions that Lord Judge and his team have drawn from this process.

Covert surveillance powers are a critical tool for investigators dealing with terrorist and serious criminal activity, and the work of the OSC is essential to ensuring that there is public confidence in the way that such covert powers are used. I am pleased to note that the report finds the vast majority of public authorities are complying fully and conscientiously with the statutory requirements, and that the OSC are working actively to identify and address any issues that arise, and any cases that fall short of desired standards.

In February 2015 I directed the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Stanley Burnton, to oversee the use of directions given under section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. The Commissioner has since carried out a comprehensive review of the use of section 94 directions, the extent of their use and the processes and policies that govern their use. I welcome the Commissioner's support for the changes that we are seeking to make through the Investigatory Powers Bill which will replace the use of section 94 directions with a more comprehensive statutory regime for the acquisition of communications data in bulk or the issuing of a national security notice. Accompanying this new statutory regime will be codes of practice that will contain far greater detail and clarity around the policies, procedures and safeguards associated with the use of these powers.

I would like to thank both Commissioners, and the staff that work for them, for the continued diligence and rigour with which they undertake their oversight roles and commend these reports to the House.

[HCWS76]

## TRANSPORT

### HS2: South Yorkshire Update

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin):** Since the Government proposed that South Yorkshire should be served by a high speed station at Meadowhall in 2013, opinion among local stakeholders has remained divided. This has made the decision about where to best to locate an HS2 station in South Yorkshire very challenging. I would therefore like to thank Sir David Higgins, Chairman of HS2 Ltd, for the work he and HS2 Ltd have undertaken in re-appraising the options and welcome the report he has published today on this issue.

The report re-examines both the HS2 station location and route in South Yorkshire as well as alternative high speed city centre proposals at both Sheffield Midland station and the former Sheffield Victoria station.

There are two key recommendations:

That HS2 services should serve Sheffield Midland station in Sheffield city centre by running high speed 'classic compatible' trains into Sheffield via a dedicated link off the main high speed line. Under this proposition Sir David believes it would be possible to provide two trains per hour into Sheffield city centre and a new high speed service to Chesterfield.

That the high speed main line be moved further east, initially running parallel to the M18. Sir David suggests that this alignment not only avoids the complexities and risks associated with the Meadowhall route but also provides journey time savings to services heading to Leeds, York and Newcastle.

The report also notes that using the existing Sheffield Midland station for HS2 services opens up the possibility of running high speed trains from Sheffield to Leeds by building a link back onto the main HS2 line north of Sheffield. This link could deliver Transport for the North's (TfN) ambition for a frequent 30-minute journey time between Leeds and Sheffield, and might also be used by Birmingham-Leeds HS2 services, allowing them to route through Sheffield. TfN are considering the Sheffield-Leeds corridor alongside other Northern Powerhouse rail schemes and I look forward to their

advice on how the HS2 mainline can be utilised to help deliver their aspirations for fast and frequent city centre services across the north.

I appreciate that the recommendations set out by Sir David Higgins today will cause concern for those living along this newly proposed route and will also be unsettling for those living alongside the consulted route via Meadowhall. HS2 Ltd will now engage closely with these affected communities to provide them with the necessary support and information as quickly as possible. I would also like to reassure homeowners along both routes that they are eligible to apply to the Government's exceptional hardship scheme from today.

Before I reach a decision about HS2 in South Yorkshire I will want to consider today's report in detail. It is my intention to make an announcement on the HS2 Phase Two route, of which South Yorkshire is a part, later this year. Should I decide to adopt the report's recommendations as my preferred option in South Yorkshire I will then hold a public consultation in order to allow local stakeholders and affected communities the opportunity to comment on the proposal, alongside a consultation on the property compensation and assistance schemes for the entire route.

[HCWS63]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Office for Nuclear Regulation: Annual Report

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson):** Later today the Office for Nuclear Regulation's Annual Report and Accounts for 2015-2016 (HC 112) will be published. Having consulted the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change who is accountable for nuclear security and the Office for Nuclear Regulation, I can confirm, in accordance with Schedule 7, Section 25(3) of the Energy Act 2013, that there have been no exclusions to the published document on the grounds of national security.

[HCWS64]

# ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 7 July 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CHURCH COMMISSIONERS</b> .....	1034	<b>ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL</b>	
Human Trafficking .....	1035	<b>AFFAIRS</b> .....	1019
Lords Spiritual.....	1037	Apprenticeships .....	1029
Out-of-school Education Settings .....	1034	Badger Culls .....	1027
<b>ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE</b> .....	1036	Data: Public Availability .....	1024
Church Commissioners.....	1037	Endangered Species: Hunting Trophies.....	1021
Disadvantaged Communities .....	1038	Farmers: Support Payments.....	1028
Historic Churches: Toilet Provision.....	1039	Farming Businesses: Resilience .....	1019
Referendum Manifestos .....	1036	Food Prices .....	1028
Women Bishops .....	1038	Regional Food and Drink .....	1025
		Rural Development Programmes .....	1022
		Topical Questions .....	1029

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 7 July 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b> ..	25WS	<b>JUSTICE</b> .....	31WS
Neighbourhood Planning .....	25WS	Cremations.....	31WS
<b>DEFENCE</b> .....	26WS	Judicial Conduct Investigations Office: Annual	
Submarine Dismantling Project .....	26WS	Report.....	32WS
United States Visiting Forces: Contingent		Legal Services Regulation .....	33WS
Liability .....	26WS	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	34WS
<b>ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE</b> .....	27WS	Surveillance and Interception of	
Committee on Climate Change: UK's Carbon		Communications.....	34WS
Budgets.....	27WS	<b>TRANSPORT</b> .....	35WS
Office for Nuclear Regulation: Annual Report.....	27WS	HS2: South Yorkshire Update.....	35WS
<b>ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL</b>		<b>TREASURY</b> .....	25WS
<b>AFFAIRS</b> .....	28WS	Infrastructure (Financial Assistance) Act 2012:	
June Environment Council.....	28WS	Annual Report.....	25WS
<b>FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE</b> .....	30WS	UK Debt Management Office: Business Plan .....	25WS
St Helena and Ascension Island: Child		UK-Turkmenistan Double Taxation Conventions .	25WS
Safeguarding.....	30WS	<b>WORK AND PENSIONS</b> .....	36WS
		Office for Nuclear Regulation: Annual Report.....	36WS

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned, and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than  
Thursday 14 July 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE  
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

---

## CONTENTS

Thursday 7 July 2016

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1019] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*  
*Church Commissioners*  
*Speaker's Electoral Commission Committee*

**Business of the House [Col. 1041]**

*Statement—(Chris Grayling)*

**Russia: Implications for UK Defence and Security [Col. 1056]**

*Statement—(Dr Julian Lewis)*

**Backbench Business**

**Online Abuse [Col. 1063]**

*Motion—(Mrs Miller)—agreed to*

**Creative Industries [Col. 1109]**

*Motion—(Julie Elliott)—agreed to*

**Sri Lanka: Human Rights [Col. 1148]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Blood Cancers [Col. 383WH]**

*General Debate*

**Written Statements [Col. 25WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

---