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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 12 July 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

HABERDASHERS' ASKE'S CHARITY BILL [*LORDS*]
Bill read a Second time.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

West Bank

1. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the number of demolitions by Israel of Palestinian homes and other structures in the west bank in 2016. [905808]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Before answering this question, may I take this opportunity to say that, two weeks ago, I had the difficult task of responding to the written Foreign Office question submitted by our former colleague, Jo Cox? Given her active role in foreign affairs, I completed this task because I believe it is what she would have wanted. Given the frequency and the passion with which she spoke and indeed influenced policy in this very forum at Foreign Office questions, I thought it appropriate to begin by paying tribute to her.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for what he said, which is warmly welcomed in the House. More than anyone in this House, the hon. Gentleman knows of what he speaks, and I thank him.

Mr Ellwood: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

We are deeply concerned by the continued demolition of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities, and the worrying spike in the rate of demolitions this year. In all but the most exceptional circumstances, demolitions are contrary to international humanitarian law. We regularly raise our concerns about demolitions with the Israeli Government. We make it clear that such actions do not encourage the confidence-building measures needed for talks to recommence.

Richard Burden: I associate myself with the Minister's words about our former colleague and friend, Jo Cox. She was an exceptional Member of Parliament and an

exceptional person as well. Perhaps the greatest tribute any of us can give to Jo is to continue her work to support human rights throughout the world.

One of the things Jo was passionate about was justice for the Palestinians. According to the UN, Israel has demolished 649 Palestinian structures this year, and 1,000 people—over 400 of them children—have been displaced. The situation is getting worse, not better. I know that the Minister condemns these things, but if Israel feels it can continue with a culture of impunity, why should it stop? What can the international community do to show Israel that it does not have impunity, and what specific actions would the UK Government support?

Mr Ellwood: Thank you very much for those initial comments. We agree and we are hugely concerned about the rate of demolitions. We need to place additional pressure on Israel and, indeed, the Palestinians to come to the table. I am pleased that we held a summit in Paris to discuss the overarching challenges that we face and the role that the international community can play. The extent of the demolitions was highlighted in the Quartet report, produced by Russia, the US, the EU and the UN, which underlines the very concerns that the hon. Gentleman has outlined.

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I, too, would like to associate myself with the Minister's moving words about our late colleague, Jo Cox. As for the general point, my hon. Friend is quite right when he says that this will not help in moving towards a position in which people come together to talk. There is, however, the other side of the coin, with 36 Israelis, along with four foreign nationals, murdered this year. Instead of condemning the murders, the Palestinian Authority glorified them. Surely, when just this weekend the Israeli Prime Minister said that he would meet without conditions, we should urge the Palestinian authorities to do precisely that and have direct talks.

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend raises a very important issue. We regularly raise and discuss these matters at Foreign Office questions. Now that we have had the Paris summit and seen a meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Egyptian Foreign Minister Shoukry, we can see this issue coming back on to the agenda. My concern—I raised it at the Paris summit—is that with all the other distractions and concerns in the middle east, we have lost sight of something that needs to be resolved. My right hon. Friend makes the important point that the actions of the Palestinians do not go unnoticed, and we require the leadership of President Abbas to make it clear that those actions must be condemned.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): As well as demolishing Palestinian homes on the West Bank, Israel continues to arrest and detain Palestinian children in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. G4S, which has provided services for Israeli military checkpoints and prisons, has been found by the UK national contact point for the OECD guidelines to be in breach of its fundamental human rights obligations. Will the Minister join me in calling for G4S to withdraw fully from its relevant contracts with the Israeli state agencies?

Mr Ellwood: I will certainly look into the case that the hon. Lady raises. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is concerned about the treatment of Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons and has raised it with the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, and I raised it during my recent visit to Israel. We have done some work—and, indeed, have invested some funds—to ensure that the children are looked after in the best possible way.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The demolition of Arab houses, and of Jewish houses, was started by us, the British, between the wars, during the operation of the terms of the British mandate for Palestine. Today, the Israeli Government specifically cites British mandate law as a justification for the current demolitions. Has the Minister had conversations with his Israeli counterpart about the legitimacy of using that law today?

Mr Ellwood: Given our legacy and the breadth of our influence over the last couple of hundred years, I think it wrong for any Government in the world to point to British policy and say that, historically, it is the cause. All laws can be updated, and both sides have a responsibility to come together and resolve this matter for the long term.

Embassies

2. **Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP):** What guidance he issues to British embassies on whether they are obliged to respond to inquiries from British companies seeking assistance to understand the laws and regulations relating to their business dealings with the country in which the embassy is based. [905809]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Our embassies and high commissions play a key role in promoting British interests and helping British companies to enter new markets. The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and I have led delegations of businesses overseas, and we work closely with UKTI to ensure that our businesses receive continued support and advice.

Mhairi Black: One of my constituents has written to a certain embassy many times, and, although it acknowledges his correspondence, he has never received any further response, which is preventing him from fulfilling an important part of a significant business deal. Could the Minister provide any assistance by obtaining a full response from the embassy on behalf of my constituent, so that he can be given more information?

Mr Ellwood: I was aware of that case, and I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising it. If any other Members are concerned about a lack of support from embassies for businesses in their constituencies, will they please let us know?

I understand that the head of UKTI in Morocco, with which the company concerned wishes to trade, has been speaking to the company directly. I can only apologise for the delay in providing the normal level of support that we would expect to give any company wishing to do business in Morocco or, indeed, anywhere else.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that not enough small and medium-sized businesses export around the world, and that, because our balance of trade is widening, we must constantly review our trade policy? In particular, does he agree that British embassies around the world could help with digital linking between consumers around the world and potential exporting companies in this country?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend raises an extremely important point, which covers a specific interest that we can espouse. The Foreign Secretary had an opportunity to brief ambassadors and high commissioners when they returned to the UK last week. Given the new environment in which we find ourselves, the role that embassies and high commissions can play throughout the world in establishing new markets and exploring new opportunities—as well as revisiting old ones—is now critical.

Departmental Trade Specialists

3. **Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab):** Whether his Department plans to recruit more trade specialists as a result of the outcome of the EU referendum. [905810]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): Let me begin by welcoming the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) to her new post, along with her compact team—a model, I hope, of improved productivity in the UK economy, although time will tell.

As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced last month, the Government are creating a new EU unit which will bring together the brightest and best from Whitehall and the private sector, including lawyers, financial experts and trade experts. The Government are actively seeking to recruit trade specialists, and that includes approaching former civil servants who have retired or moved to the private sector.

Mr Cunningham: I thank the Foreign Secretary for that answer, but can he tell the House how much this is going to cost?

Mr Hammond: No, not at this stage, but what I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, facing the opportunities we now do, recruitment of trade specialists, whatever that costs us, is likely to be an investment very well worth making.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Is the Foreign Secretary heartened by the fact that since we voted to leave the EU a number of key countries and economies, including India, China and Australia, have approached the UK regarding furthering trade, and how well that compares with the stalled trade talks that have taken many years between the EU and such countries as the US and Canada?

Mr Hammond: Yes, it is a source of some optimism that a number of significant economies around the world have indicated that they would be open to the idea of trade agreements with the UK, and my hon. Friend makes a point that is very obvious but none the

less important: that negotiating a trade deal between two countries is always going to be much easier than negotiating a trade deal between one country and 28 countries.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Last week at the Foreign Affairs Committee Oliver Letwin stated that

“we clearly need a new cadre of highly skilful and highly experienced trade negotiators.”

I hope the Secretary of State sees the irony in the fact that the very best of our trade negotiators are based in Brussels, but can he assure the House that from now on we will indeed bring in the best trade negotiators notwithstanding their nationality?

Mr Speaker: I think the hon. Lady had in mind the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin). I am not sure I recognised the name she mentioned.

Mr Hammond: I was puzzling about that myself and am grateful for your clarification, Mr Speaker, and, having had it, I am very happy to answer the hon. Lady’s question. As I said in response to the initial question, we will need to hire significant numbers of trade negotiators and—I said this in the House a couple of weeks ago—I see no reason why we would not hire people who were non-British if they were the best people to do the job. Clearly, one would not want to hire a citizen of another country to negotiate a trade deal with that country, but having entered that caveat, I would hope we put together the best and most capable teams from wherever.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am sure the Foreign Secretary will agree that the Prime Minister’s trade envoys have played a very important role around the world. As our relationship with the EU changes, will he make representations to ensure that that programme is rolled out across Europe as well?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend raises a good point, and that will of course be an issue for the new Prime Minister as trade envoys are personal appointments of the Prime Minister.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the assessment of a former permanent secretary of the Foreign Office that to deal with the legal and political complexities of leaving the EU the Foreign Office will need to double in size?

Mr Hammond: I absolutely recognise there is a huge and complex task ahead of us in negotiating both our exit from the EU and, perhaps more importantly, the new arrangements Britain will have with the EU 27, but this is a project that will have a limited duration: once the negotiations are completed the task will be done, and I am not sure increasing the size of the Foreign Office will necessarily be the most appropriate way of doing that. Having a specialist unit to deal with this short to medium-term task may well be the most efficient way of delivering the outcome.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The incoming Prime Minister told us yesterday that she intends to make a success of Brexit and part of that is clearly going to be trade talks with countries throughout the

world. Has the message already gone out to our embassies and high commissions that even before Brexit happens initial talks about trade should start with other countries?

Mr Hammond: The message that has gone out is that Britain will need to redouble its efforts in international trade and refocus where the trade is concentrated in the future. I should also make it clear that until we have served an article 50 notice, we remain a full participating member of the European Union. Our ability to negotiate new trade agreements is restricted by the continued application of EU law until we have negotiated our exit from the European Union, so we have to tread a careful path. Of course we can have preliminary discussions, but we must ensure that we remain on the right side of our international obligations at all times.

Human Rights: China

4. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Chinese Government on the promotion of human rights in that country. [905811]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): We regularly raise human rights with the Chinese authorities. I most recently discussed human rights with the Chinese ambassador a fortnight ago, and my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the human rights dialogue with State Councillor Yang last week. In addition, my right hon. Friend raised concerns last month with the president of the Supreme People’s Court about the detention of human rights defenders.

Jeff Smith: Following the UK’s withdrawal from the EU, we will need to develop a new set of trading relationships with China. What reassurances can the Minister give me that that process will not diminish our ability or our resolve to publicly condemn the Chinese Government for human rights abuses?

Mr Swire: The hon. Gentleman will know that we are very keen to get a date for the annual human rights dialogue. That is the right architecture within which to raise individual cases. However, we will continue to raise individual cases of human rights abuse, and if there is no human rights dialogue, we will have to increase that.

22. [905829] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Can the Minister tell us exactly what action he is taking to question the Chinese Government about their brutal persecution of those who peacefully practise Falun Gong, particularly in relation to the live harvesting of organs?

Mr Swire: We have raised concerns about reports of organ harvesting, as well as about the torture and mistreatment of detainees, during the annual UK human rights dialogue. We will continue to do that at the next round. Equally, we pay close attention to the human rights situation in China and we remain extremely concerned about restrictions placed on freedom of religion or belief of any kind, including Falun Gong practitioners.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I should like to associate myself with the Minister's remarks about Jo Cox, the MP who tragically lost her life. She was a fellow colleague from the 2015 intake. She was an advocate for refugees and a fierce and passionate champion of the dispossessed. We miss her very much at FCO questions, and her memory inspires us all as parliamentarians to work selflessly for those whose voice is rarely heard.

In relation to the human rights situation in China, Amnesty International has stated that at least 248 human rights lawyers and activists have been targeted by the authorities over the past year. They include the prominent lawyer, Wang Yu. She and 12 others are now under formal arrest on charges of subverting state power. What is the Minister's assessment of this targeting of human rights activists? Does he agree that, on occasion, the Government's approach lacks assertiveness in relation to human rights in China?

Mr Swire: I should like to associate myself with the hon. Lady's first remarks, but I dissociate myself from her concluding remark. I believe that, on balance, we have got the situation just about right. We are concerned about the human rights lawyers and we continue to raise the issue. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did so with the president of the Supreme People's Court of China, Zhou Qiang, on 9 June. He has also raised our concerns with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, and we will continue so to do.

EU Withdrawal Negotiations

5. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): If he will ensure that the Scottish Government are included in negotiations on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. [905812]

11. **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): If he will ensure that the Scottish Government are included in negotiations on the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. [905818]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, we must ensure that the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom are properly taken into account as we progress these negotiations. So, as we prepare for talks with the European Union, we will fully involve the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland Governments as well as the Mayor of London, the overseas territories and other regional interests. Officials of the new EU unit, which I mentioned a few minutes ago, will be making contact with counterparts in the devolved Administrations.

Owen Thompson: While that answer is encouraging, it does not exactly give a lot of detail—much like the plans of the Brexiteers as they went into the referendum. What formal role will the Scottish Government and the other devolved Governments have in the process of formalising Brexit?

Mr Hammond: As we do with other matters, we will consult the Scottish Government both formally and through informal dialogue, including at senior official level on an ongoing basis.

Stephen Gethins: The Scottish Government have been clear that EU nationals must be a priority. Given their net financial contribution, does the Foreign Secretary agree that EU nationals should be more of a priority than new nuclear weapons? Any new Chancellor should be especially mindful of that.

Mr Hammond: I am unsure whether the two issues need to be prioritised. They can both be pursued in parallel. The decision to renew our nuclear deterrent is quite separate from the negotiations that we will be having with the EU, including negotiations to ensure the rights of EU nationals living in the UK and the reciprocal rights of UK nationals living in EU countries.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Regardless of whether the Scottish Government are involved in the negotiations, will the Secretary of State confirm that the negotiations are purely about us leaving the EU and not some sort of renegotiation of our terms of membership that will result in a halfway house where we are half-in and half-out of the EU?

Mr Hammond: Yes, I can confirm that. The next Prime Minister has made it clear that Brexit means Brexit: we will be negotiating our exit from the EU. However, we will of course also seek to negotiate an agreement between the United Kingdom and the EU 27 to regulate our trade and other relationships with the EU.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it would be far better for Scotland to play a productive role in securing a new relationship between the UK and the EU, rather than looking to join as a new member, get the euro and put a border across this island?

Mr Hammond: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. Scotland's best future is in a strong United Kingdom, trading effectively with the EU. We saw the case for independence during the previous referendum—it did not stack up at \$100 a barrel of oil and it certainly does not stack up at \$50 a barrel.

19. [905826] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The highlands and islands currently benefit from an additional €192 million of transition funding. Given the incoming Prime Minister's haste to get on with Brexit, will the Secretary of State confirm that the UK Government will guarantee that funding?

Mr Hammond: Britain is a significant net contributor to the EU, but that contribution includes a significant number of flows to particular regions, areas, projects and bodies within the United Kingdom. We will have to address how the recipients of those flows of funds from Brussels are to be protected in the future and that will be an important part of the negotiations.

20 [905827]. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Scotland has benefited from access to EU research and a wealth of talented researchers and academics. *The Guardian* worryingly reported this morning:

“Britain’s vote to leave the EU has unleashed a wave of discrimination against UK researchers”.

Scottish universities and their staff are concerned. What is the Foreign Secretary’s message to the universities, research staff and workers that benefit from being part of the EU? How will he ensure that Scotland and its interests are protected?

Mr Hammond: This issue is not just about Scotland; it is much wider than that. I will say two things. First, as long as we are a full member of the EU and are paying the full sub, we must ensure that there is no discrimination against the UK, UK institutions, UK applicants for funding or UK citizens. Secondly, the point of negotiating an arrangement for Britain’s relationship with the EU 27 after we have left the EU is precisely to protect collaborative research, educational projects and cultural exchanges in addition to our important trading relationships.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I begin by thanking the Foreign Secretary for welcoming me to this new job? It is right to say that we are compact team, but we have the advantage of being made up of two blessed difficult women, and so we are formidable and up for the task. If rumours of promotion are true, this may be my final session with him before he takes another job. It would seem that everyone is in flux. He has a reputation of being a formidable but approachable Minister to shadow, so I will be sorry if our acquaintance is so brief.

The Foreign Secretary rightly said that he has given assurances that he will consult Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, London and Gibraltar on the Government’s negotiating strategy for Brexit prior to triggering article 50. Will those assurances also apply in respect of Her Majesty’s Opposition, to ensure that the needs and concerns of the communities we represent are reflected as the Government develop their negotiating strategy?

Mr Hammond: First, I am surprised to hear the hon. Lady saying that she expects promotion. I thought that those in the Labour party who were expecting promotion threw their hat in the ring yesterday—perhaps she is going to be a late entrant to that competition. On the substance of her question, of course there will be extensive discussion about all these issues in Parliament. The Opposition will have an opportunity to present their views, and we shall listen carefully to them.

Emily Thornberry: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but I was hoping that I would get greater assurance than that and that there would be formal consultation with Her Majesty’s Opposition prior to the start of negotiations. We must avoid the mistakes made by the outgoing Prime Minister before his resignation. He had no proper consultation with Opposition parties, no proper discussion took place and there was a totally artificial timetable. Had the Prime Minister done those things, perhaps he would have got a better and more inclusive deal, the country might not have voted for Brexit and he might not be stepping down tomorrow. Does the Foreign Secretary not accept that the Prime

Minister made a mistake and can he guarantee that those mistakes will not be made by the new Prime Minister?

Mr Hammond: Perhaps I dare say to the hon. Lady that I might have been a bit closer to those negotiations than she was and I can confidently say that engaging with the Opposition would not have affected the outcome.

Mr Speaker: I am sorry, but the questions and answers are taking too long. [Interruption.] Order. What we need now is a couple of pithy inquiries, not elongated ones.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The whole of Scotland is deeply concerned about the personal future of the Foreign Secretary, given his apocalyptic statements during the recent referendum. For example, he told Chatham House on 2 March that leaving would take longer to negotiate

“than the second world war.”

Will it take longer to negotiate Brexit than the second world war? How would any future Chancellor of the Exchequer deal with such uncertainty?

Mr Hammond: I think the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that the concern is this: if a future treaty between the United Kingdom and the European Union 27 is deemed to be a mixed competence, it will have to be ratified by 27 national Parliaments. I believe I am right in saying that the shortest time in which that has been done in respect of any EU treaty is just under four years—that is after taking into account the time it takes to negotiate.

Alex Salmond: That is a yes then. Did the Foreign Secretary see the poll at the weekend carried out by YouGov across European countries? It showed two things: first, that the UK Government were deeply unpopular in every other European country; and, secondly, that massive majorities of the public in every country surveyed were looking forward to an independent Scotland within Europe. Why are the UK Government so unpopular, and why is Scotland so popular in Europe?

Mr Hammond: I would have thought if there was one lesson to take from the events of the past three weeks, it was, “Do not read polls”.

Bangladesh

6. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What steps he is taking to support political liberty, freedom of expression and human rights in Bangladesh. [905813]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Our condolences go to the victims and the families of those involved in the horrific and cowardly terrorist attack in Dhaka on 1 July. Where credible allegations of human rights abuses exist, we raise them with the Bangladesh Government. Bangladesh is named as one of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s 30 human rights priority countries. The British Government also fund a number of programmes that support civil society in Bangladesh.

Andrew Stephenson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Supporters of the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist party have told me that hundreds of its party workers have now disappeared, and Amnesty International referred to at least 43 enforced disappearances in its latest international report. Whatever the true number, does he agree that the political situation in Bangladesh is now extremely serious and it is vital that political rights are protected?

Mr Swire: Yes, I agree, and I condemn all forms of violence and excessive use of force. Equally, we made it clear in public and in private that justice must be done in a manner that fully respects the international human rights standards to which Bangladesh has signed up.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Human Rights Watch identified Bangladesh as having the highest rate of child marriage. This is a fundamental breach of human rights, particularly for those girls who are forced into marriages at such an early age. What are the Government doing to make their views known to the Bangladesh Government, and through the Commonwealth and other organisations, that such practice is not acceptable?

Mr Swire: Clearly, it is not acceptable, and we continue to have a robust dialogue with the Bangladesh Government. We are also a significant aid donor working on some of these projects in that country.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Hindu priests have been brutally murdered and other religious minorities savaged. What actions has my right hon. Friend taken to inform the Bangladeshi Government that that is completely unacceptable and that they have to face up to their responsibilities?

Mr Swire: Indeed. I can only repeat what I have just said. We have robust discussions with the Government of Bangladesh. We are extremely concerned about the situation in that country, not least because of its connections with Daesh and other organisations and its basic human rights as well.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): What specific representations has the Minister made to the Government of Sheikh Hasina following the brutal murders in the diplomatic enclave of Gulshan in Dhaka? The area should have been very secure, and yet those murderers and terrorists were allowed in to murder 20 people on 1 July.

Mr Swire: The Prime Minister wrote to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 2 July to extend his condolences. I spoke to Foreign Minister Ali on 5 July to express my condemnation of this senseless act of horror.

Anglo-Indian Relations

7. **Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** What recent assessment he has made of the strength of diplomatic and economic relations between India and the UK. [905814]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Our relations with India remain extremely good. Only this week, I spoke to a high-level

group of Indian businessmen here in the United Kingdom, and of course they wanted to know what is happening now with our relationship with India following the recent referendum.

Alex Chalk: For individuals and businesses in Cheltenham, the UK's relationship with India is increasingly important. How will it change post-Brexit?

Mr Swire: We still have in this country 1.5 million Indians or people of Indian descent, so the connections are huge and robust. People come to the UK a lot and people go to India a lot. Clearly, early talks about the shape of our trade relationship with India will form part of our discussions over the next year or so.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): On the diplomatic front, what discussions has the Minister had with the Indian Government about the recent events in Kashmir?

Mr Swire: We are very saddened by the recent reports of unrest in Kashmir and we offer our condolences to the victims and their families. Our high commission in Delhi is monitoring the situation closely, and we have updated our travel advice accordingly.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend referenced the fact that discussion about a future trade relationship will take place in parallel with our exit negotiations from the European Union. What kind of capability does he need to recruit to his Department to get into the detail of those discussions?

Mr Swire: My hon. Friend will know that trade policy is with UK Trade & Investment, but I will repeat what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said earlier. We are aware that we need to recruit and retain more trade negotiators. We are still a member of the EU until the last of the negotiations have taken place, but there is absolutely no reason not to start having exploratory talks, and we are beginning to do that.

Middle East Peace Talks

8. **Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to support the French initiative to start peace talks between Israel and Palestine. [R] [905815]

12. **Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP):** What steps the Government are taking to support the French initiative to start peace talks between Israel and Palestine. [905819]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): As I mentioned earlier, I attended the French ministerial conference on the middle east peace process in Paris on 3 June. We are in close contact with the French Government and will consider how the UK might contribute as their plans develop.

Andy Slaughter: It is a pity that the Foreign Secretary could not attend that conference. Will he be attending or advising his successor to attend the main conference later this year, and will he join France and other European

countries in recognising Palestine if Israel refuses to co-operate with the French initiative and continues building settlements?

Mr Ellwood: To make it clear, the summit was moved at short notice to accommodate the US Secretary of State. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in Africa at the time, which was why I was able to attend. I hope the hon. Gentleman does not feel short-changed by the fact that I was there instead of the Foreign Secretary. It was an important meeting, as it registered the need for the international community to play its part and we look forward to moving ahead with the process. Discussions will take place in the next few months to bring the parties together.

Ms Ritchie: In the light of recent moves by the Egyptian Foreign Minister, does the Minister believe that the chances for successful peace talks are improving? What efforts will the Government make to ensure that both Israel and Palestine are sufficiently incentivised to come to the table to talks?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right to say that both parties need to be sufficiently incentivised. The worry that I have had when visiting both the Palestinian areas and Israel is that the leaders on both sides are not necessarily speaking for the people, who generally want something different. My concern is that unless we see the affirmative steps taking place to reverse the trends that we have been seeing, we will drift towards an entrenched position of a one-state reality, with perpetual occupation and conflict.

23. [905830] **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): Will the Minister assure us that the Foreign Secretary or his successor will attend the peace conference that the French are planning later this year?

Mr Ellwood: On the day before a reshuffle is to take place, let me say that I will heed the right hon. Gentleman's comments and we will do our best. The implication seems to be that the Foreign Secretary is somehow not engaged in these matters. We have those set conferences and summits, but an awful lot of bilaterals also take place, not least at the NATO summit in Warsaw, where my right hon. Friend had bilateral meetings with his relevant counterparts. These very important issues are raised there as well.

Refugee Crisis

9. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What discussions he has had with his counterparts in the EU, Africa and the middle east on dealing with the refugee crisis in Europe and the middle east. [905816]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): We have these discussions regularly and our consistent focus is on securing a comprehensive and durable solution which tackles the causes as well as the consequences of migration.

Michael Tomlinson: Will the Minister reaffirm this Government's commitment to Operation Sophia? Can he confirm that we will continue to co-operate with our European allies in relation to the refugee crisis?

Mr Lidington: I can confirm that. The Prime Minister said shortly after the referendum that we would continue our contribution to Sophia, which has already saved more than 16,400 lives and has destroyed more than 160 smuggling vessels.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Minister in close contact with the leading aid agencies—the International Rescue Committee, Save the Children and Médecins sans Frontières? They seem to have a different take from Governments on what is happening in camps and with movements. Is he keeping in touch with them?

Mr Lidington: My colleagues in the Department for International Development are in constant touch with the main aid agencies, and our very large humanitarian effort in Turkey, Syria itself and the neighbouring countries, Lebanon and Jordan, is very much focused through the UN, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other such agencies.

25. [905832] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): In view of the fact that the appalling hardships and loss of life arising from the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean are clearly long term and in danger of becoming institutionalised, will my right hon. Friend give consideration to the proposal from the International Chamber of Shipping, originally put forward last autumn, to establish a UN humanitarian zone covering the affected areas?

Mr Lidington: Although the International Chamber of Shipping proposal was indeed constructive, I do not want to underestimate the difficulties of getting agreement in the Security Council on anything through the UN. We have Operation Sophia, which is working and to which many European countries are actively contributing, and we should aim to make that work still more effective, help the Libyans build up the capacity of their own coastguard, and use the instruments available.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the Minister accept that in respect of the Brexit negotiations, much work will require to be done to secure joint EU-UK efforts in northern Africa on tackling the escalating refugee crisis?

Mr Lidington: So long as we remain members of the European Union and afterwards, it will remain in the interests of this country that we work very closely with our European friends and allies. This is a problem that will be with us for a generation and it will need concerted international co-operation.

Trade and Diplomatic Connections: UK/Commonwealth

10. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to promote trade and diplomatic connections between the UK and other Commonwealth countries. [905817]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): We have eight Commonwealth trade envoys representing British business interests in 10 Commonwealth states. We have expanded the British Government's representation in a number of countries,

and we are looking forward to the inaugural Commonwealth Trade Ministers meeting in London in March next year, which will be co-hosted by ourselves and the Government of Malta.

Martin Vickers: With the decision to withdraw from the EU, many British companies will be looking to expand their business with Commonwealth countries. What specific plans do the Government have to support them in that respect?

Mr Swire: That is something we are concentrating on. Intra-Commonwealth trade is estimated at over \$680 billion, and it is projected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2020. The Commonwealth includes 53 member states, a quarter of the world's land mass and 2.2 billion people, and 60% of the Commonwealth's population is under the age of 30, so there are some huge and exciting opportunities there.

17. [905824] **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Now that we have this wonderful opportunity to boost trade with the Commonwealth, will my right hon. Friend make sure that small countries in Africa and Asia are not left behind in what I believe will be a trade bonanza?

Mr Swire: I hope my hon. Friend is right. It is worth remembering that three quarters of UK-Commonwealth trade is with India, Australia, Canada, Singapore, South Africa and Malaysia, so we do need to expand that into some of the Commonwealth countries of Africa.

Diplomatic/Economic Relations: Caspian and South Caucasus Region

13. **Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to enhance diplomatic and economic relations with the Caspian and South Caucasus region. [905820]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The United Kingdom has strong bilateral relations with countries in the Caspian and South Caucasus region. It also has significant commercial interests there, particularly in the oil and gas sector.

Mr Baker: To defend Europe against excessive reliance on Russian energy supplies and to provide opportunities for small British energy firms—particularly those from Scotland—will my right hon. Friend continue to encourage and support BP in its work with the Government of Azerbaijan to deliver the trans-Turkish pipeline?

Mr Lidington: Indeed. That pipeline is in the economic and strategic interests of the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend also makes a strong point about Scotland: many Scottish companies are in Azerbaijan in the wake of BP's investment, and that is another example of how the UK and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, through our embassies, are helping to deliver for the people of Scotland.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I was in Tbilisi, in Georgia, last week with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. A number of people we spoke to were extremely concerned

about the impact of the UK leaving the European Union on a lot of the diplomatic work that is going on to encourage countries such as Georgia to move towards western Europe. What assessment has the Foreign Secretary made of that issue, and what steps is he taking to persuade people in countries such as Georgia that their future lies in links with western Europe?

Mr Lidington: We were very active in the preparation for, and at, the NATO summit in Warsaw to emphasise that our commitment to working closely with countries such as Georgia to bring them into the Euro-Atlantic family of nations continues, and I think their Governments well understand that commitment.

ISIS/Daesh

14. **Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the progress of the international campaign to defeat ISIS/Daesh. [905821]

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): Significant military progress has been made in Iraq, Syria and Libya since my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary updated the House on 24 May. Iraqi security forces have liberated Falluja. The Syrian Democratic Forces are closing in on Manbij in Syria. In Libya, Misratan forces have pushed Daesh back to the city centre in Sirte, and the Libyan national army is winning the battle against Daesh in Benghazi. We now need to see political progress in Syria, Libya and Iraq to match those military successes.

Dr Whitehead: What initiatives has the Secretary of State undertaken recently to ensure that the international effort concentrates on securing the defeat of Daesh, rather than of the proxies, or the allies, involved in the process?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is referring, I think, to the situation in Syria, where there are two separate battles going on: the civil war between the regime and its opponents, and the battle by the international community against Daesh. We are clear, and always have been clear, that there cannot be lasting success against Daesh unless we resolve the political crisis in Syria and create a regime that is acceptable to the Sunni Muslim population of Syria, giving them an alternative to the appalling offer from Daesh.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Countering Daesh in Libya requires a stable Government and an end to the country's ongoing civil war. On 19 April, the Secretary of State said that the new Government of National Accord is "the only legitimate Government of Libya."—[*Official Report*, 19 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 781.]

Will he therefore assure the House that, since the GNA was formed last December, no British support has been provided to any Libyan militia group that is not allied to the GNA, such as those working with former general Khalifa Haftar?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady knows that if we were minded to commit combat forces to activity in Libya, we would first come to the House of Commons. We are

working very closely with the Government of National Accord, including talking to them about how we can use exemptions from the UN arms embargo to forge a closer working relationship between militias and that Government. She will be interested to know that later this afternoon I will meet Prime Minister Sarraj here in London.

Topical Questions

T1. [905798] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): My priority is to ensure that we continue to address, head on, Islamist extremism and the threats to the rules-based international system, while at the same time pivoting resources to respond to the major foreign policy challenge of implementing the UK's decision to leave the EU and negotiating the terms of Britain's future relationship with the EU 27.

Alex Chalk: Britain is a global trading nation. What steps have been taken to ensure that our embassies and high commissions around the world are in the best possible position to forge excellent trading deals for the United Kingdom?

Mr Hammond: As one of my colleagues said earlier, last week we had all our senior people in London for the annual leadership conference, and I clearly set out to them the challenge to the Foreign Office and its network as we move into this new phase where we will seek to redouble our efforts to build trade relationships around the world beyond the European Union. I can tell my hon. Friend, and the House, that I got the resounding response that they are up for that challenge.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Earlier today, the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled against Chinese claims to territorial rights in the South China sea, backing a case brought by the Philippines. Does the Secretary of State agree that the PCA's ruling must be respected, and that any non-compliance by the Chinese Government would not only cause severe reputational damage to China but constitute a serious breach of international law?

Mr Hammond: The UK's position has always been, and will remain, that we urge respect for international law and the rules-based international system, and decisions arising from international tribunals. As the hon. Lady will know, the ruling is 501 pages long. It flopped on to my desk just before coming over here to answer questions—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) is obviously super-efficient; I might test her later. We will study the decision carefully. If the hon. Lady can give me any insight into her understanding of page 432, I would be very grateful.

Mr Speaker: So would we all.

T2. [905799] **Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the threat of nuclear proliferation, especially across Asia and the middle east?

Mr Hammond: We take the threat of nuclear proliferation very seriously indeed. We have made huge progress over the past 18 months in shutting down the Iranian nuclear weapons programme. We remain deeply concerned about the programme in North Korea and about the risk of proliferation particularly from North Korea. We work very closely with allies and partners around the world to address that challenge.

T4. [905801] **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Given the upsurge in violence in South Sudan over the weekend, what action have Ministers taken on the situation there?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The hon. Gentleman is right to raise concerns about the growing conflict in South Sudan. The outbreak of fighting around Juba is very serious indeed. I attended a signing bringing the two sides together in South Sudan over a year ago, and there was a huge amount of optimism at that point. Unfortunately, that has dissipated, and there are now 2.4 million displaced people there. We are watching events very closely, and we urge the sides to come together to begin peace talks again.

T3. [905800] **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): After five decades of armed conflict in Colombia, where some 200,000 people have lost their lives and many millions have been displaced, a historic ceasefire has been agreed between the Colombian Government and FARC. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the peace process and Britain's role within it?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Yes, of course. I welcome the bilateral ceasefire and disarmament agreement reached by the Colombian Government and FARC on 23 June. That is a significant step towards ending more than 50 years of conflict that have affected the lives of so many Colombians. We will continue to support Colombia during the implementation of the peace accord.

T5. [905802] **Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): The Foreign Secretary is probably aware that over the weekend the Indian security forces opened fire on a funeral procession in occupied Kashmir, killing more than 30 people, with the death toll expected to rise, 100 wounded and ambulances attacked. Will the Minister meet his counterpart in the Indian Government and inform them that opening fire on funeral processions or protestors is not correct and that the perpetrators should be brought to justice?

Mr Swire: I refer the hon. Lady to my earlier comments about the situation in Kashmir, which we are following very closely. Our high commissioner and the team are very much on the case. We regret all violence in that part of the world.

T8. [905805] **Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): The situation in the Maldives continues to deteriorate. What steps have been taken to persuade its Government to change its current trajectory?

Mr Swire: We are extremely concerned. We strongly encourage the Government of the Maldives to engage constructively with both the United Nations and the Commonwealth envoys and to implement all of the

recent recommendations of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. It is crucial that concrete progress is delivered by CMAG's September meeting. We are also considering bilateral action, including exclusion orders against senior members of the Government and the judiciary.

T6. [905803] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Chagos islanders were the first victims of the UK's nuclear policy, given that their eviction helped the UK get a discount on Polaris. Lords at the Supreme Court now advise that a refusal to permit resettlement may be "irrational, unreasonable or disproportionate". Will the Secretary of State advise the new Prime Minister of those factors and ask her to make a quick decision on resettlement for the Chagos islanders?

Mr Philip Hammond: As the hon. Gentleman and the House will know, we have been studying options relating to the British Indian Ocean Territory and the situation of the Chagos islanders. The current Prime Minister has taken a great interest in the issue, but it is clear that it will now fall to the new Prime Minister to make a decision.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The people of Gibraltar feel particularly concerned about pressure from Spain now that we are leaving the European Union. Will the Minister for Europe confirm that their Government will be fully involved in the negotiations, and does he agree that their economy could be given an immediate boost, first, by a free trade agreement between Gibraltar and the UK, and, secondly, by ruling out any redundancies in the civilian, locally employed Ministry of Defence force?

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My hon. Friend is a doughty champion of Gibraltar. I saw the Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo, yesterday; it was my third such conversation with him since the UK referendum. I have not only recommitted the British Government to the full involvement of Gibraltar in the negotiations for our exit from and subsequent relationship with the EU 27; I have also invited the Chief Minister to identify the key economic priorities for the people of Gibraltar as we approach those negotiations.

T7. [905804] **Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): Judicial executions in Iran have more than doubled since 2010 and there have been 2,400 executions since President Rouhani was elected three years ago. What representations have the Government made to the Government of Iran over the execution of children, particularly those such as Fatemeh Salbehi and Jannat Mir, an Afghan boy who was hanged when he was just 14 or 15 years old?

Mr Philip Hammond: We regularly make representations to the Government of Iran about the widespread abuse of human rights there, including the widespread use of the death sentence and the completely unacceptable practice of imposing death sentences on minors. We will continue to make such representations at every opportunity.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): Commonwealth countries are already large investors into the UK. Will the Government continue to work with Commonwealth business groups, such as the Confederation of Indian Industry, to make sure that that track record continues?

Mr Swire: Yes, we most certainly will, and we will certainly continue to work with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council on promoting intra-Commonwealth trade.

T9. [905806] **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): May I thank the Foreign Secretary for hosting an event at the Foreign Office yesterday evening to commemorate the 21st anniversary of the massacre at Srebrenica? We all listened in silence to the tales told by survivors of the massacre. Will he join me in saying that it is important not only that we remember Srebrenica, but that we redouble our efforts to show future generations where hate and intolerance can lead?

Mr Philip Hammond: Yes, of course I will. Anyone who was there last night will have heard the moving testimony of people who survived the terrible events in Srebrenica 21 years ago and their harrowing tales of their experiences and the utterly needless and unjustified slaughter that occurred. The whole purpose of remembering Srebrenica is not just to remember, but to ensure that we apply the lessons and that it can never happen again.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): An important economic relationship that we have with India is the Tata Steel UK portfolio. Will the Secretary of State continue to make sure that its protection continues to be at the forefront of our diplomatic relationship with India so that we can continue to have a sustainable steel industry in this country?

Mr Hammond: I can tell my hon. Friend that this remains a high priority for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): Claire Martin died in Italy four years ago due to stab wounds in the neck. Her death was recorded as suicide. Her parents are my constituents, and they need the full weight of the Foreign Office to help them. Support has been lukewarm and half-hearted so far. Will the Minister promise to step things up a gear and help this family?

Mr Lidington: I am happy to have a further conversation with the hon. Lady and her constituents about this tragic case. Of course, it remains the case that the United Kingdom cannot carry out investigations in the Italian judicial system, any more than the Italian Government can do so here. However, my understanding is that the magistrate has offered a meeting with the family, and I hope that that may provide a way forward.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): The anniversary of the Iran nuclear deal falls in two days. Will the Minister update the House on what discussions he is having with his US counterparts on banking sanctions to encourage more British businesses to invest in Iran?

Mr Philip Hammond: Those discussions continue. I promise that this is not a planted question—[*Interruption.*] Sorry. What is one of those? The hon. Lady will not know this but there is a meeting this afternoon at Lancaster House between the Iranian Central Bank, the United States Treasury and international banks based in London in an attempt to try to make some

progress on this matter so that the people of Iran can start to benefit from the seminal deal that was done a year ago.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: It is a pleasure to welcome back to the House the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn, Tulip Siddiq.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My constituent Nazanin has been detained in Iran for 100 days now, with no access to lawyers and minimal contact with her three-year-old daughter. Will the Minister join me in formally denouncing the actions of the Iranian authorities and make sure that Nazanin and Gabriella are returned to their home in West Hampstead as soon as possible?

Mr Hammond: We continue to lobby the Iranians regularly about all our consular cases in Iran, including that of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe. I have raised the case a number of times, and, on 4 July, spoke to Foreign Minister Zarif. I subsequently followed that up with a letter. On 18 May, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), the Minister with responsibility for the middle east, met Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family. We will continue to push the Iranians for consular access to her—the challenge is that Iran does not recognise dual nationality—and for more information about the charges that are alleged against her.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): From my recent NATO Parliamentary Assembly visit to Kiev, I know that there is palpable fear from the Ukrainians that sanctions may start to be lifted against Russia and President Putin. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that cannot happen until meaningful discussions have taken place on Ukraine's sovereign borders?

Mr Hammond: I would go a little further: that cannot happen until Russia has complied with its obligations under the Minsk agreement. At the weekend, in Warsaw, I met the Ukrainian Foreign Minister. My hon. Friend is right that there is concern among Ukrainians that Britain's departure from the European Union may lead to a weakening of European Union resolve on this issue. I very much hope that that will not be the case, but it is certainly true that we have been one of the leading advocates of a tough line within the European Union.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): In the light of the ongoing dreadful events in Sudan, many of us find questionable the context and the content of the UK-Sudan strategic dialogue. What red lines do the UK Government have in that dialogue?

Mr Ellwood: If I may, I will ask the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), the Minister with responsibility for Africa, to write to the hon. Member with more detail. However, I can say that the dialogue is an important juncture in our relationship, and we were invited by Sudan to commence it. Let me make it very clear that we need to continue to support Sudan. It is a source, host and transit country for migration. What is going on there affects the rest of

Europe, and so we want to continue to help with the dire humanitarian situation there. The 2.5 million people long-term displaced people need our support.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): May I join those who are welcoming the fact that a large number of big players in the global economy are queuing up to do bilateral trade deals with the UK? My many Korean constituents would very much like to know whether that includes South Korea, which is a brilliant trade partner with the UK.

Mr Philip Hammond: Of course, the European Union has an existing free trade agreement with the Republic of Korea. Under that free trade agreement, the UK's exports to Korea have more than doubled over a very short period of time. Once we are outside the European Union, depending on the details of the arrangements we make with the European Union, we will be ready to enter into new trade agreements with all countries around the world. The UK will remain an outward-facing trading nation, delivering our prosperity by our success around the globe.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): What recent discussions, if any, have the Government had with Turkey about its opposition to the Syrian Democratic Forces' offensive to relieve Manbij, which is a very important strategic battle?

Mr Hammond: I met my Turkish opposite number and sat next to President Erdogan in the plenary session at the NATO summit in Warsaw at the weekend, and we discussed this issue. Of course, the SDF assault on the Manbij pocket is vital, and it will close a strategic gap and cut off supplies and routes for fighters into Syria in an important way. The Turks' concern is the role of Kurdish organisations within the SDF, including some that are associated with proscribed organisations. The US is brokering a solution that seeks to reassure the Turks while reinforcing the SDF and their ability to deliver their objectives in Manbij.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We have run out of time, but my appetite for hearing my colleagues is almost insatiable. I call Kevin Foster.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. We recently marked the first anniversary of the dreadful terrorist massacre at Sousse in Tunisia. Can the Minister update me on the work that is being done by the Foreign Office to support the families of the victims and to mark that dreadful event?

Mr Ellwood: I had the honour of representing Britain at the ceremony that took place in Sousse to mark the anniversary of the tragic events there. We have done everything we can, from a Government perspective, working across Government to provide support to those who are bereaved, those who were seriously injured and those who have been affected by the mental trauma of what they saw. That help continues, and I am pleased to confirm the announcement that the Prime Minister made at the weekend that a memorial will be built—it is

expected to be in the north of England—to mark the horrific events and to give the families a solemn location at which they can pay their respects.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Can the Foreign Secretary tell the House what progress has been made in persuading our allies to provide support for Yazidi women who have escaped from sexual slavery under Daesh and who are now in great need of medical and psychological support, which they cannot access properly in either Syria or Iraq?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to draw attention to those who are fleeing persecution by Daesh. We have had a number of debates on the matter, and it is not just the Yazidis; it is Christians and other minorities as well. We are using our Department for International Development funds to support the non-governmental organisations that directly target those people to provide that support in the immediate aftermath, but also in the long term.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I thought I had detected emissions of steam from Slough. That is a fate better avoided, I think. I call Fiona Mactaggart.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. The reason I was steamy is that I spoke this morning to my constituent whose husband, Nawaz Khan, has been detained in South Sudan since 18 June without charge. It seems to me that in view of the situation and the turmoil there, it is urgent that the British authorities demand his release or charge instantly. This man is a diabetic, and he is not being properly looked after. It is time we defended our citizen.

Mr Ellwood: The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this matter. We have already touched on the concerns that we have about South Sudan and the instability that we are seeing there, despite the transitional Government of national unity. The right hon. Lady has raised an important consular case, and I will ask the Minister with responsibility for Africa to get in touch with her to find out what consular support is being provided.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am sorry that I cannot accommodate all colleagues, but I will take Joanna Cherry.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Can the Minister tell the House whether following Brexit the United Kingdom will continue to participate in the Paris climate change agreement, or whether that agreement will need to be rewritten?

Mr Ellwood: This is a prime example of where we need to calm down and not scaremonger. We are absolutely committed to COP 22 on climate change, and to the target of reducing our emissions by 2050.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will call the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) who I think wishes to raise a constituency matter, but that really will be the last question.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The Minister will recall the case of my constituent, Deborah Pearson, and her niece Julie Pearson who was killed in Israel last year. Her family are constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh). We now have the autopsy report, but it is in Hebrew and it has been suggested that the FCO might assume the cost of translating it. Will the FCO support that? I am grateful for the Minister's support so far, but the family are desperate and need more support. Will he consider further help?

Mr Ellwood: This has been a difficult case for the family and for everybody involved. I have met a number of hon. Members who have been involved, and I also raised the issue with the Israeli authorities. It is not normal for the Foreign Office to provide translation facilities. Perhaps we could discuss the matter outside the Chamber and work to provide assistance to the family.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I know we have overrun, but Foreign Office questions tend to break box office records and Ministers should take some pride in that fact—the other way of looking at it is that I am giving them additional speaking opportunities.

Points of Order

12.41 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Reports have come in that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), who is standing for the leadership of my party, has had her constituency windows broken, and the police have confirmed that such an incident has taken place. Can we take this opportunity to deplore such hooliganism and thuggery, whoever commits it and whichever party is involved? It is totally unacceptable, and one hopes that the police will apprehend the culprit as quickly as possible.

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. It is not strictly in any procedural sense a matter for the Chair, but it is in one respect because, in common with all colleagues, the Chair believes in democracy and the peaceful exchange of opinion. We are a pluralist society, and if people think that they will get their way through violence, threats and intimidation, they will soon find themselves wrong. If I may say so, no one is more suited to making that point than someone who has served as a democratic parliamentarian for as long as the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Unfortunately, for all sorts of reasons, I was not able to be here for business questions last Thursday, so later I had to read *Hansard*, which I scoured for announcements regarding next week's business, particularly for next Monday. On Saturday, I gather that the Prime Minister announced—not to the House or even in this country, but in Poland—that next Monday we will be debating the renewal of Trident. I make no judgment about how people should vote on that, but why has the House still not been formally told that that will be our business next week? Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Defence had the perfect opportunity to make that clear to the House, had he wanted to. On today's Order Paper, a motion tabled by the Leader of the House states:

“That, at the sitting on Monday 18 July, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the UK's nuclear deterrent not later than 10.00pm”.

That is a kind of sub-announcement that we will debate the issue next Monday, but we have still had no sign of what the motion will be, whether it will be amendable, and under what terms that debate will be held. Surely it would be more courteous to the House to have a proper supplementary business statement that lays out next Monday's business.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He has the advantage of being right on both counts.

Simon Kirby (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): Not always.

Mr Speaker: A junior Government Whip chunters from a sedentary position that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) is not right always, but the same could be said of junior Government Whips. On this matter, however, the hon. Gentleman is right in

both respects: motion 5 on today's Order Paper is posited on the assumption that there will be a debate on Monday 18 July on the UK's nuclear deterrent; and this debate has not been notified to the House, other than via a passing reference to it yesterday by the Secretary of State for Defence in the course of the statement on the recent NATO summit. I make no complaint about what the Prime Minister might have been thinking or what he intended, or if he was caused or tempted to comment elsewhere—I am not focusing on that point. What I am focusing on is that if there is to be a change of business, there should be a supplementary business statement. That is the way we do our work in this place.

If I may say so, the usual channels, whatever their opinions on the merit of the issue, really ought to be aware of that point, which is blindingly obvious and brooks no contradiction—it is very, very, very straightforward. We cannot get into a situation in this place in which we do business in a disorderly fashion. The procedures of this House are for the protection of this House and all Members ought to take that very seriously. They certainly ought to be aware of the significance of that and some sort of remedial training is required for those who are not.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The Ministry of Defence released a press release—this is therefore not just a glancing reference by the Secretary of State—stating that there would be a motion, but the House has certainly not been informed. Indeed, the motion is about not renewal, but the principle of continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence, which in my view seems to be a different issue.

Mr Speaker: Well, I confess I do not know what press offices get up to in these matters, but suffice it to say that ultimately the Secretary of State in a Department is always everywhere and for everything responsible in that Department. We probably should not dwell on this further, but let us try to learn from it for the future.

Chris Bryant: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am in a benign and generous mood, so I will allow a further point of order from the hon. Member for Rhondda.

Chris Bryant: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The point, surely, is that, as things stand, unless the Leader of the House gives a clear statement to the House, Thursday morning will be the first time we will know for certain what next Monday's business will be, by which time it will be impossible for us to table amendments to the motion that will be taken on Monday, unless you are going to be very generous about the tabling of manuscript amendments and so on. Surely, when we are considering the defence of our nation, it is ludicrous for the Government to indulge in such shenanigans?

Mr Speaker: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is twofold. First, it would be better if there were a supplementary business statement. I would have thought that the terms in which I have answered him make that so clear that the point needs simply to waft from the scholarly cranium of the junior Whip on duty to the powers that be in the relevant Government Department.

[Mr Speaker]

Secondly, in the absence of any such supplementary business statement, which I really would regard as a considerable discourtesy to the House, the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members can be assured that it will be possible to table amendments on Thursday. I have not thought about the precise chronology of events, but if it is necessary for me to allow manuscript amendments, because of circumstances not of the hon. Gentleman's devising, they certainly will be allowed, subject only to those amendments, in terms of content, being orderly. I think the Whip has got the message.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope it is a point of order and not the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman used to chunter when he was heckling me 30 years ago at the University of Essex student union.

Ian Austin: Whether or not it is a point of order is for you to judge, Mr Speaker. On a happier note, I would like to thank you and the Officers of the House for enabling us to display in the Jubilee Room today a range of products manufactured in the black country, which as you know, Mr Speaker, is the greatest place in the world. If you have five minutes in your busy schedule to visit the Jubilee Room, you will see parts manufactured for Bugatti, Lamborghini and Ferrari, and the Olympic torch, which was also made in the black country. If that is not enough of an attraction, there is also some beer that was brewed in Dudley North. All Members are very welcome.

Mr Winnick: It is nice to agree with my hon. Friend for once.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must speak for himself.

I very much appreciate what the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has just said. If it is possible for me to pop in, I will try to do so, although I am not sure what the hours of this event are.

Ian Austin: From now until 4 o'clock.

Mr Speaker: I will do what I can, and I encourage other Members to do likewise.

We come now to the ten-minute rule motion, for which the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) has been so patiently waiting.

EU Citizens Resident in the United Kingdom (Right to Stay)

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

12.50 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a bill to grant EU citizens the right to stay resident in the UK following the UK's withdrawal from membership of the European Union; and for connected purposes.

On 24 June, 3 million EU citizens in the UK and 1.3 million British citizens in the EU woke up to an uncertain future because while the Brexiteers had pithy slogans aplenty, our Government had no plan for the long-term future of EU citizens in the UK or the UK post-Brexit. EU citizens were unable to vote in the referendum and were therefore left without a voice during the campaign. They now find themselves without the protection of their EU citizenship rights in the UK. EU citizenship includes not just the right to live, work and study in the UK but, for example, the right to participate in local, regional and European elections.

The current Prime Minister gave an assurance that there would be no immediate change, but this now carries little weight, given that we will have a new Prime Minister tomorrow. His assurances are therefore time-limited and have an imminent sell-by date. He has offered no protection for the rights of EU citizens and Brits abroad in the future. By calling and then losing the referendum, the current Prime Minister pulled the rug out from under the feet of these citizens. He needs to get that rug out of the removals van that is parked outside No. 10 and put it back before he departs. EU citizens need certainty about their long-term future in the UK, and they need this assurance now, before their futures are used as bargaining chips in our negotiations with the EU.

The Prime Minister has just appointed a new EU commissioner to replace Jonathan Hill, rather than leaving that to his successor. He should also act now while he still has time to secure the rights of EU citizens by unconditionally granting the right to stay to all EU citizens who were resident in the UK on 23 June. He can never make full amends for triggering a chain of events that will lead to economic and diplomatic disaster for the UK, but this would help to restore a modicum of credibility in the dying day of his premiership. If he fails to do so, there are three ways in which EU citizens' rights could be safeguarded in the future.

First, a legal challenge might rely on an appeal under article 70.1(b) of the Vienna convention on the law of treaties. However, as Professor Douglas-Scott pointed out in an article for the UK Constitutional Law Association entitled "What Happens to 'Acquired Rights' in the Event of a Brexit?", there is no consensus among lawyers about the application of the convention to EU citizens living in the UK. Neither does there seem to be much scope for protecting the position of EU citizens in the UK or Brits abroad through customary international law. EU citizens might have to wait years before any rights that they might have under the convention could be tested in court.

Secondly, the Government could negotiate an agreement with EU member states to allow the right to remain on a reciprocal basis for EU citizens living in the UK and British citizens living in the EU. The problem with that approach is that it turns EU citizens into bargaining chips. Such a negotiation does not yet have a start date, and the House has already condemned it, by 245 votes to two, as wrong in principle. To barter over the future of EU citizens and Britons in the EU would be to treat EU citizens as if they were children in a divorce settlement. That would be humiliating to the individuals concerned and their families, and it would demonstrate a shameful lack of political judgment on the part of the British Government. It would also be a very weak negotiating strategy, because there is a good chance that EU member states are likely to act to guarantee the rights of British citizens unilaterally.

Unless a future UK Government intended to hold EU citizens hostage in order to achieve concessions in other areas of the negotiations, such as access to the single market, there would be nothing else to negotiate. In his evidence to the Home Affairs Committee this afternoon, I am sure that the Immigration Minister will be pressed further on this issue. There were signs over the weekend, given comments by the Foreign Secretary at the NATO summit and reports on Saturday, that the Government's position might be softening.

The third approach, which is that proposed by my Bill, would be for the Government to legislate now to secure the rights of EU citizens unilaterally, thereby providing desperately needed certainty for all EU nationals living here. We must make EU citizens feel welcome and safe in Britain. This reassurance would also help the 1.3 million British people living in the EU, help to secure the future of the 9% of NHS doctors who work in the UK and are from the EU, and help to ensure that Britain remains open and welcoming.

Yesterday, I met the campaign organisation New Europeans, which is a voice for EU citizens in the UK, and other charities and non-governmental organisations

representing migrant communities. New Europeans has gathered more than 2,000 signatures on a letter to the Prime Minister asking for the issue to be resolved now. I also draw the House's attention to early-day motion 259 on the status of British citizens resident in the EU and EU citizens resident in the UK, which makes the same call.

As I have mentioned, following a debate on a Labour motion, the House showed by a clear majority of 245 votes to two that it favoured sorting out the situation of EU citizens living in the UK immediately. Thanks to New Europeans, in the next few days I will also be meeting the EU Commission in the UK and ambassadors to EU member states in London to discuss the issue.

It is quite clear that many EU citizens no longer feel welcome in Britain and that many are leaving. I met someone earlier this morning who said exactly that: he and his partner feel that the only thing to do is to leave the UK, and they will be doing so shortly, even though they have lived here for more than 20 years and paid significant tax during that time. They no longer feel welcome. Numbers of race hate crimes and xenophobic attacks have increased since the referendum. In London alone, where more than 800,000 EU nationals live, there have been three race hate crimes every hour. These threats and acts of discrimination will continue unless and until the Government make it clear that they will ring-fence the rights of EU citizens who were living in the UK before 24 June. Providing such clarity is the purpose of the Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Tom Brake, Tim Farron, Caroline Lucas, Mark Durkan, Dr Philippa Whitford, Kevin Barron, Mr Mark Williams, Mr Alistair Carmichael, Mr Nick Clegg, Norman Lamb and Greg Mulholland present the Bill.

Tom Brake accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 October, and to be printed (Bill 50).

Opposition Day

EU Referendum: Energy and Environment

12.58 pm

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the uncertainty created by the result of the EU referendum for the protections currently in place for the UK's energy security, climate change commitments and the natural environment; notes that the discussion leading up to the EU referendum made little mention of environmental protection or climate change and considers that regulations and ambitions in those areas should in no way be diminished as a result of the outcome of that referendum; has serious concerns about the signals being sent to investors in those sectors by continued uncertainty; and therefore urges the Government to identify and fill any legislative gaps in environmental protection that may arise from the removal of EU law.

The motion stands in my name and those of other right hon. and hon. Members in the shadow Cabinet.

Before the referendum vote, the Government were already facing major problems securing the energy needs, emissions targets and environmental protections that the UK requires for the 21st century. These problems were mainly self-inflicted: an energy policy that left companies and investors confused, with feed-in tariffs for solar changed retrospectively; an effective moratorium on onshore wind power, despite its being the cheapest form of renewable energy; the subsidy for offshore wind cut; and the Government failing to indicate what would happen to the levy control framework beyond the cliff edge of 2020.

Investors were told that the Government were simultaneously incentivising new unconventional gas and phasing out unabated coal by 2025, yet the £1 billion still remaining for the development of carbon capture and storage was cut just four weeks before the final bids were to be made, with the consequent announcement by Drax of the abandonment of the White Rose CCS project and the announcement by Shell that it no longer saw a future in the near term for the Peterhead project. The Secretary of State's energy reset speech last November ended up leaving us the equivalent of 54 million tonnes of CO₂ further from achieving the fourth carbon budget.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): For many of the companies involved, the investment lead-in times are quite long, resulting in a very uncertain environment in which to work. That is leading to some of them pulling out of the UK altogether.

Barry Gardiner: I must, reluctantly, agree with my hon. Friend. This is not good news; it is really bad news for all of us. The investment climate in the UK is in a really dire state. In fact, the UK has now fallen from eighth to 11th to 13th in the Ernst & Young index of the best countries for investment in low-carbon technology, when we have previously never been outside the top 10. These are really worrying matters.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I recently asked the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what action she was going to take to promote zero-carbon homes, given that the Government had announced last July that they were going to scrap the target set by the previous Labour Government for all homes to be carbon-neutral by this year. She replied

that she could reassure me that an EU directive was due to come into force in 2020 and that she believed near-zero carbon emissions would help to reduce bills. Given that we are leaving the EU, does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should take immediate action to reintroduce ambitious targets for zero-carbon homes?

Barry Gardiner: What an excellent point my hon. Friend makes. She knows, as I do, that the Secretary of State was someone who saw the value in the UK's staying in the European Union and in all the directives and regulations that came from Europe, which afforded the sort of environmental protections and energy policies that would secure our future. No doubt the Secretary of State will respond responsibly to today's brief, but I think she will feel a great deal of sympathy both with the remarks that my hon. Friend has just made and indeed my own remarks from the Dispatch Box.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case about the lack of investment and about economic instability. Does he agree with me that now is a good time for the Government to reverse their decision to privatise the Green Investment Bank, and that when they negotiate withdrawal the Government should make a strong case to remain in the European Investment Bank? If those two things do not happen, we will be in really difficult times.

Barry Gardiner: The hon. Lady, whom I regard as an hon. Friend, particularly on these matters, speaks with great knowledge. She is absolutely right about the Green Investment Bank, which was set up for a particular purpose: the Government recognised that there was a market failure. It was quite right of the Government to put the Green Investment Bank in place, but unfortunately the borrowing powers did not come quickly enough, and I think it is a huge mistake now to privatise the bank. It is a matter of deep regret to all who work in this environment. As for the hon. Lady's remarks about the European Investment Bank, I shall come on to that subject later in my speech.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): On the subject of insecurity in investment, National Grid has said that fuel prices are about to rise as a result of the Brexit result. My "Prepay Rip Off" campaign showed that consumers were being overcharged to the tune of £1.7 billion a year. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important that the Government outline what they are going to do to ensure that consumers are not ripped off further by having to pay more for their fuel?

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend and constituency neighbour has run a superb campaign on fuel poverty. She makes reference to the £1.7 billion that the Competition and Markets Authority report showed UK bill payers were being overcharged—overcharged by quite obscene amounts. It is, of course, right for the Government to come up with clear proposals about how to tackle that abuse, without just saying, as they have to date, that people need to be enabled to switch more easily.

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): This is one of the first of our debates to mention the result of the EU referendum. I know that the hon. Gentleman was on the other side of the argument, so it would be useful if

he told us whether, when it comes to a vote, he will vote to leave the EU despite his heavy heart or will he vote against the wishes of the British people?

Barry Gardiner: I always try to look at the motion in front of me on the Order Paper and make a judgment on it when I see what it says. I have done so for the past 19 and a half years, and I suspect I shall probably do it for the next few years as well.

Even the Government-dominated Select Committee has warned that what it calls the “hiatus” in project developments could threaten the UK’s ability to meet its energy and climate security targets, so when the Department’s own figures show the need for £100 billion of investment by 2020 to make our electricity infrastructure fit for purpose, the Secretary of State really does have to explain where she believes that investment is going to come from, given that investor confidence in her Department is at an all-time low.

Before the Secretary of State does so, however, perhaps she will confirm whether she instructed her Department not to prepare in any way for a leave vote, as the Prime Minister apparently directed. If that is so, can she explain why, because that is what business leaders out there are asking? It seems incomprehensible to them that the Prime Minister took such a gigantic risk with their future—a risk that will increase their cost of capital and the cost of energy to bill payers, both corporate and domestic alike—yet made absolutely no preparations for what might happen when that risk went the wrong way.

The IIGCC—Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change—a group of institutional investors representing over €13 trillion in assets, said in the aftermath of the vote to leave that it had brought

“considerable uncertainty and market turmoil.”

That only goes to prove that the art of litotes is not yet dead!

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of that dramatic uncertainty, does my hon. Friend agree that one thing the Government should do is to give a cast-iron guarantee that they will honour, post-Brexit, the environmental standards and undertakings that we have made in the EU to date?

Barry Gardiner: My hon. Friend, who takes a consistent and committed interest in these matters, is absolutely correct, and the precise intention of this motion is to flush out those issues and ensure that the Government do precisely as he says.

In the aftermath of the leave vote, the Government’s own external adviser has stated that a future for the Hinkley C nuclear power station is now “extremely unlikely”. Vattenfall has said it is now reassessing the risk of working in the UK, which could jeopardise its plans for a £5.5 billion wind farm off the east coast of England, while Siemens has announced that it is putting a freeze on its future—not its current—clean energy investments in Hull as a result of what it called the “increased uncertainty” from the leave vote.

I must say that for all the talk from the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea

Leadson), about the “sunlit uplands” of the post-Brexit world, there is really no use in the Secretary of State trying to pretend that she thinks the vote is anything but a disaster when she herself is on record quoting the analysis of Vivid Economics warning that the result of an exclusion from the EU’s internal energy market could cost the UK up to £500 million a year by the early 2020s. The stock response of the right hon. Lady that Labour Members should not “talk Britain down” will simply not serve, given that these quotations come from her own advisers, industry leaders and, indeed, her!

Bloomberg New Energy Finance was not scaremongering when it said of the upcoming Brexit negotiations that they were

“likely to cause project investors and banks to hesitate about committing new capital, and could cause a drop in renewable energy asset values”.

That was an authoritative, independent commentator telling the unvarnished truth.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I always follow the hon. Gentleman’s comments with a great deal of interest, but is it not about time that he and his party moved on? The British people have delivered their verdict. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that it is not terribly helpful of people like him to continue to talk the British economy down in that way?

Barry Gardiner: I understand that there is a need to move on, and the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must now look to the future, but I think that if he bears with me, he will find that that is what I am trying to do. Yes, I am critical of where we are, but the criticisms that I have adumbrated so far are not my own. They are criticisms made by the Government’s own advisers, they are criticisms made by industry itself, and, indeed, they are criticisms made by the Secretary of State. I am not talking the UK economy down; I am trying to set out the present situation with clarity, and then see whether we can move on from it.

Perhaps the Secretary of State could do the same as Bloomberg in telling the unvarnished truth, and inform the House what assessment her Department has made of the increased price of imported energy as a result of the falling pound. I will happily give way to her if she wishes to do so.

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd) *indicated dissent.*

Barry Gardiner: Perhaps, then, the Secretary of State could tell us what assessment her Department has made of the price premiums on loans that will be demanded by investors in energy infrastructure to cover the cost of political uncertainty. Is it 1%? Is it 2%? Again, I will happily give way to the Secretary of State if she wishes to inform the House what assessment her Department has made of those matters. No? In that case, I will give way to the spokesman for the Scottish National party.

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman take the Secretary of State to task on what she intends to do to achieve the climate change targets in respect of completely decarbonising the transport and heating sectors in order to achieve 2050 targets?

Barry Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It is clear from what the Committee on Climate Change has said that the area in which the United Kingdom is falling behind most badly is not the power sector, but the transport and heating sectors. Of course, dealing with that does not rest solely with the Secretary of State; it also rests with her colleagues in the Department for Transport and the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Perhaps the Secretary of State would find it easier to explain how the UK might continue to benefit from the EU internal energy market—or does Brexit mean Brexit in this regard as well? We really do need clear answers to all these questions. Perhaps the right hon. Lady can tell us what will happen to the four clean energy projects that are currently being assessed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments. She knows that the European Investment Bank has been the UK's biggest clean-energy lender, having put €31 billion into clean energy over the last five years. Has she identified a replacement source of funds for such projects?

Perhaps the Secretary of State can explain why, last week, the Government pulled their funding for the only large new gas plant that had managed to secure finance under the capacity market scheme after Carlton Power was unable to secure the investment that was needed for the Trafford plant. The capacity market has resoundingly failed to secure the new gas build that it was introduced to incentivise.

Perhaps the right hon. Lady can explain—after the failure of the green deal, and after acknowledging that neither the warm home scheme nor the energy company obligation is sufficiently well targeted to reach those most in need—precisely how she proposes to address energy efficiency and tackle the fuel poverty experienced by 2.38 million of our fellow citizens. Let me correct that, Mr Speaker: I should have said 2.38 million households, in England alone. Perhaps the right hon. Lady might also explain why National Grid warned on Friday that the lights were kept on only by emergency measures last year. The fact is that the Government's energy policy has pushed us further towards energy insecurity.

Our purpose in securing this Opposition Day debate is precisely to ensure that the Government cannot ignore such pressing concerns following the referendum. The vote to leave was not a vote for blackouts and soaring energy bills; it is the Government's responsibility to ensure that those things do not happen.

The Committee on Climate Change, which has a statutory duty to advise the Government on the most cost-effective route to decarbonisation, has always made it clear that early action is cheaper action. As its chief executive warned us last week, leaving the EU calls the mechanism of how we reach our targets into question. The Government's policy failure has created a 10% gap in emissions projections towards our legally binding climate target for the mid-2020s, and they are nearly 50% short of meeting their intended target for 2030—that is, if the Secretary of State ever gets round to actually complying with her statutory obligation to set the target. I believe that that is now due to happen on Monday, which would make it only 18 days beyond the legal statutory limit.

Last year, the Environmental Audit Committee gave the Government a red card for their record on managing future climate change risks. The chair of the Infrastructure Operators Adaptation Forum concluded:

“we simply do not know the capability of the vast majority of stuff out there for current weather, never mind the future”.

The National Security Risk Assessment cites flood risk to the UK as a tier 1 priority risk, alongside terrorism and cyber-attacks, and, of course, it is our most deprived communities that face the greatest increases in flood risk. However, new evidence released today by the Committee on Climate Change renders starker than ever the threat to British households and businesses from a failure to manage climate change. Its published estimates show that, without increased Government action on climate adaptation, the number of homes at high risk from flooding will rise to well over 1 million even if we meet our current climate targets.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): I apologise for intervening so early, Mr Speaker. Will the hon. Gentleman please explain the precise relationship between the European Union issue and the questions that he is raising about flooding?

Mr Speaker: The Minister is not intervening that early, although some people might think that the hon. Gentleman was approaching the conclusion of his preliminary remarks.

Barry Gardiner: I am sure you are correct, Mr Speaker, in referring to “his preliminary remarks”.

I am happy to explain that relationship. Unless we have clarity about the post-Brexit scenario, unless we know where we will be able to secure funds to replace all the funds that fell within the common agricultural policy to finance measures to mitigate flooding, and unless we are able to deal with land management in the way that was allowed by the European Union, we will not have clarity on these matters, and clarity is vital to adaptation.

We are living at a time of increased risk, and robust planning is required to limit harmful impacts on British communities and businesses. I say in all seriousness that, following the devastation of communities and cities around our country by recent floods, this new assessment requires a new response from the Government. Cuts in the budgets, and in the staffing capacity of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Environment Agency, have left the UK increasingly vulnerable, and the Government must take responsibility for that.

The UK's ability to face up to energy and environmental challenges—more than almost any other area of policy—was strengthened by our EU membership. Given that the Treasury's principal response to the leave vote so far is a U-turn on the Chancellor's core election pledge to balance the books by 2020—

Dr Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner: I think you would like me to press on, Mr Speaker, so I will not. I have, I think, been most generous in giving way.

Given the Treasury's response, it would be helpful to hear from the Under-Secretary, when he winds up the debate, precisely where he proposes to find the additional resources that are required for adequate flood defences to meet the new assessment. Last week, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told the House:

"It is absolutely clear that it is business as usual while we remain members of the EU."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 2016; Vol. 62, c. 1030.]

Perhaps she will understand that what concerns many of us is that, as soon as we are no longer members of the EU, many of the protections the UK natural environment currently enjoys will fall away. The clean air directive has been strenuously opposed in Europe by this Government, who tried to water it down for years; indeed our own Supreme Court has now found them to be in breach. I pay tribute to ClientEarth and its work in holding Government to account for the 52,500 excess deaths every year as a result of polluted air in the UK, and I pay particular tribute to Sadiq Khan as Mayor of London who used the 60th anniversary of the Clean Air Act 1956 to unveil a new clean air programme.

The Government must remember that they have a job to do, and that includes taking concrete action to meet the legal air quality standards as ordered by the UK's Supreme Court. The Government need to explain to the House if they will incorporate the provisions of the clean air directive into UK law and then begin to comply with its provisions in a way that they have, tragically, failed to do for the past six years.

The birds and habitat directives may well already be fully transposed into UK law, but we need to know if our beaches will still be protected from sewage by the bathing water directive or whether swimming through sewage will once again become a feature of a day at the seaside. We need to know which elements of the waste and electronic equipment directive were not transposed into UK law under the 2013 regulations and what the impact of leaving the EU might be for our recycling industries and our commitment to the circular economy.

Dr Murrison: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Barry Gardiner: No, I will not.

The fact is that fish and birds and insects do not carry passports; pollution is oblivious to the strictures of national airspace or inshore waters. If we wish to manage all of these, whether as pests, problems or resources, then it is better to do so in concert with our regional neighbours. The vote to leave the EU has made that harder. The Government must outline how they propose to overcome that problem.

The Environment Secretary told the House last week that the subject of continued subsidies to farmers up to 2020

"is not a decision I can make at this stage."—[*Official Report*, 7 July 2016; Vol. 612, c. 1028.]

Surely it is a decision that should have been made long before anyone asked farmers to vote to leave the EU. Much of the subsidy that farmers receive is for environmental stewardship schemes and other land management practices that benefit biodiversity and wildlife. To turn round to farmers now and say that the £3.5 billion total of subsidy that used to flow each year from the

EU into their pockets is no longer secure is not just an attack on farmers' livelihoods; it is an attack on all the work that farmers do to enhance our environment and protect our landscapes.

These are not abstract challenges. Managing the risks born of the uncertainty from the referendum outcome is a responsibility for Government. Ministers must urgently identify any legislative gaps in environmental protection that may arise from the removal of EU law, and develop plans to replace any protections so that the UK does not become a riskier, unhealthier or more polluted place to live in or do business in.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): I note the hon. Gentleman's comments on the CAP, but he would be hard-pressed to find any conservation or environment group in the country that believes it provides a net benefit to the environment. There are bits that are good for the environment, but overall I do not think anyone would defend it as a net good for the environment. Surely Brexit gives us an opportunity to take those funds and tailor them in such a way that they genuinely are used to subsidise farmers in delivering a genuine public good? This is a massive opportunity.

Barry Gardiner: I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that I have been a critic of the CAP, as he has, for many years, but the pillar 2 arrangements under the CAP and the environmental stewardship arrangements under the CAP were positive and there was a net benefit from those. I want the Government to set out the new arrangements they propose, so that we can be sure that the environmental protections remain in place, and that that money is not frittered away on something else.

The Government must provide answers to Parliament and the public, who want to be reassured that our environmental protections are not to be weakened in some Brexit bonfire of the regulations. The environmental protections we have enjoyed under the EU are not bureaucracy to be done away with; they are part of what it is to live in a civilised country that respects the natural world and believes that the only prosperous future is a sustainable one.

So, finally, I ask three key questions. Will the Government now move swiftly to ratify the Paris climate agreement? How will the Government press for access to the internal energy market? How will the Government ensure that energy bills do not go up as a result of the increased investor uncertainty following the vote?

Ultimately, the Government must commit to safeguarding environmental protections to at least the same level we have enjoyed within the EU, by passing into UK law all those regulations that would otherwise fall away upon leaving the EU.

1.25 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I thank the Opposition and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) for giving the Government the opportunity to address some of these important questions which I know are high in people's minds, particularly among stakeholders. I also want to respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison): it may have escaped some people's notice, but I did campaign

[Amber Rudd]

on the other side of the EU referendum. I do agree with him, however, that we must move on: Brexit means Brexit and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) said, we will make a success of it.

It is true that the decision the country made on 23 June is of historic importance and it is true that the key challenge facing us now is to work towards a settlement that is in the best interests of Britain. But it is not true that, as the hon. Member for Brent North has been suggesting, our commitment to protect the environment, tackle climate change and provide homes and businesses across the country with secure and clean energy has faltered in any way. Our commitment to these tasks has not changed and will not change.

I have made it my priority to reiterate these points over the past fortnight. I have said that security of supply would be our first priority, and it remains so. My Department announced last week how much electricity capacity we intend to buy in the forthcoming capacity market auctions. This commitment is the backbone of our energy policy. I announced that the Government would accept the Committee on Climate Change's recommendation for the level of the fifth carbon budget, a long-term commitment taking us way beyond this Parliament to 2032. I have also made it clear that we remain committed to holding a competitive contracts for difference allocation round later this year.

While much remains the same, there is no point pretending that the vote to leave the EU is not of huge significance. There are risks for us to overcome, but this Government will continue to do our part to deliver on the energy and environmental challenges our country faces.

Geraint Davies: Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government intend to honour their commitments to the environment as set out in EU directives in the past, so that standards do not slip from the current standards, whether on air quality, flooding or climate change, and does she agree that there should be legislation to say that these should become minimum standards?

Amber Rudd: What I can say is that this Government's commitment to a clean environment and our climate change commitments remains unchanged. I will address in my remarks climate change and energy issues, and I will allow the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), to address the environmental ones in his remarks, no doubt dealing with the exact points that have been raised.

Dr Murrison: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a pity that Opposition Members seem to be suggesting that the EU has dragged the UK from darkness into enlightenment? Does she also agree that Britain has traditionally led the way in environmental legislation? I would cite particularly the Clean Air Act 1956, which the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) cited without a hint of irony.

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend and, as he rightly said earlier, we must move on. There are benefits to what we have already proposed and there have been

benefits from the EU directives as well. They have raised standards in some areas, and I believe we will now maintain them and not allow them to slip at all.

Caroline Lucas: We were speaking earlier about investment and how, unfortunately, investors are getting increasingly cautious. Will the Secretary of State do all she can to persuade her colleagues that we must remain part of the European Investment Bank, at least as long as the negotiations are going on, because if we withdraw right now there will be another huge amount of potential investment not coming into this country when we need it most?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her question; I was going to talk about investment anyway. She is absolutely right to mention the importance of investment in securing our clean energy. Like her, I appreciate the impact that the European Investment Bank has had on supporting clean energy in this country and I would hope that our membership of it will continue. I cannot give her any commitments, however. I shall wait to see how this emerges as part of the negotiations, but I share her view on how important it is.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I commend the Secretary of State's decision, in the midst of the post-Brexit turmoil, to publish the fifth carbon budget. I congratulate her on that. The Environmental Audit Committee has heard this morning from the National Audit Office that a 10% achievement gap has already opened up in the fourth carbon budget between 2023 and 2027. Will she acknowledge that the Treasury's decision in the last spending review to cancel the carbon capture and storage competition will do little to encourage investor confidence in that area?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady is right: we have always known that we had an issue with the fourth carbon budget, and there is more work to be done. That is why it was a reasonable achievement to get cross-Government approval for the fifth carbon budget, and I thank her for her comment on that. There is still a lot of work to be done. There are policies to be decided on, and we will bring forward the emissions proposals by the end of this year in order to address those policies that are going to be needed in the 2020s.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): In a former life, I was the rapporteur in the European Parliament for the European Investment Bank. We are not only a stakeholder in the bank; we are a shareholder and one of its biggest funders. It funds projects across the planet, not just within the European Union. Surely there is no risk to investment in the United Kingdom while those factors remain the same.

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying that position, which will no doubt give the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) as much comfort as it has given me.

I want to make some more comments on investor confidence, which is central to this afternoon's debate. Since the referendum, I have met investors from across the energy spectrum: nuclear, renewables, energy efficiency—all areas in which we need investment. Yesterday, I spoke to members of the managing board of Siemens

to reassure them of the commitments that I am setting out here today. Officials across my Department have regularly kept in contact with investors and energy companies to reiterate that message.

The message from business is clear. It still sees the UK is a great place to invest in. Britain remains one of the best places in the world in which to live and to do business. We have the rule of law, low taxes, a strong finance sector and a talented, creative and determined workforce. We have to build on those strengths, not turn away from them. Those factors combine with a clear energy policy framework and a strong investment-friendly economy to make the UK an ideal place to attract much-needed energy investment. The UK has been the fourth highest investor in clean energy globally for the past five years. This is investment in the energy infrastructure that we need to underpin a strong competitive economy, and this Government will do all we can to ensure that the UK remains an attractive place for investment. Whatever settlement we decide on in the coming months, those fundamentals will remain unchanged.

I want to underline our commitment to addressing climate change. Climate change has not been downgraded as a threat. It remains one of the most serious long-term risks to our economic and national security. I attended the world-class team of British diplomats at last year's Paris climate talks. Our efforts were central to delivering that historic deal, and the UK will not step back from that international leadership. We must not turn our back on Europe or the world. Our relationships with the United States, China, India and Japan and with other European countries will stand us in strong stead as we deliver on the promises made in Paris. At the heart of that commitment is our own Climate Change Act 2008. The Act was not imposed on us by the EU; it was entirely home grown. It was also a world first and a prime example of the UK setting the agenda that others are now following. And let us not forget that it was delivered with unanimous support from right across the House.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The Secretary of the State will be aware that the fifth carbon budget means that the UK is reducing carbon at a faster rate than any country in the EU and significantly faster than the EU's intended nationally determined contribution put forward in Paris. Is the risk of Brexit not that we might go back on our climate change objectives, but that we will not bring the rest of Europe with us, given the leadership position that we have taken and the fact that we are moving so much more quickly than they are?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend, who knows this area so well, has raised an important point. I hope to be able to reassure him that we will be able to continue to use our influence to encourage the European Union to raise its game and to reach the high standards that we do, but I agree with him that this will be an additional concern, on which we will have to work to try to deliver.

It is true that we had to make tough decisions on renewable energy when we came into office last year, reflecting the need to cut costs and the need for technologies to stand on their own two feet. I will not shy away from taking tough decisions. We need technologies that are low cost and clean, to protect bill payers.

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): The Secretary of State mentioned India as being among the countries standing by us in respect of investment. Given that about 2,400 coal-fired power stations are planned or under construction around the world, including in India and China, does she agree that cancelling the carbon capture and storage project represents a massive missed opportunity for this country?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have been through the issue of CCS many times. We would like to have a CCS programme and we are working on an industrial strategy to address having such a programme. I know that he has played an important part, working with Lord Oxburgh in the other place, in ensuring that we put together a clear plan. At the time, we could not go ahead with the £1 billion that had been planned for the CCS proposal, but it is not off the table at all. We are still working towards having some sort of CCS proposals.

Our commitment to decarbonisation is clear, with £13 billion of investment in renewable electricity in 2015 alone and with investment in renewables increasing by 42% since 2010. We have already set out funding to be provided through auctions during this Parliament to support up to 4 GW of new offshore wind and other renewable technologies, and with the potential for deployment of up to 10 GW in total between 2020 and 2030 if the costs continue to come down. We are also making real progress to deliver new nuclear power in the UK, addressing a legacy of underinvestment. We have announced record investment in new heat networks to enable innovative ways of heating our homes and businesses. And we will lead the world by consulting on closing unabated coal-fired power stations. That commitment has been praised across the world, and we will be setting out further details of it soon.

All those commitments remain in place. They will help us to dramatically rebuild our energy infrastructure and they are underpinned by our commitment to carbon budgets, which is why the CBI, the EEF, businesses and investors from a wide range of sectors were all so supportive of our decision to set the fifth carbon budget.

We have a proud history of energy innovation. The world's first coal-fired power station was built on the banks of the Thames in the late 1800s. The world's first nuclear power station was opened by Her Majesty the Queen in Cumbria in 1956. And well before the EU referendum had begun in earnest, my Department was making sure that this country would remain at the forefront of energy and climate change innovation. That is why, as a Government, we have committed more than £500 million over this spending review to supporting new energy technologies. That means supporting entrepreneurs as they look to develop the innovations of the future—in storage, in energy efficiency and in renewables. As part of that programme, we will build on the UK's expertise in nuclear innovation. At least half our innovation spending will go towards nuclear research and development. That will support our centres of excellence in Cumbria, Manchester, Sheffield and Preston. Our nuclear programme will include a competition to develop a small modular nuclear reactor—potentially one of the most exciting innovations in the energy sector.

[Amber Rudd]

Although I have focused primarily on energy and climate change, we must not forget the trade and businesses surrounding the environment and agricultural sectors, which are so profoundly affected by our decisions on tackling rising global temperatures. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs continues to engage with farmers, businesses and environmental groups to ensure that their voices are heard. It has been made clear to them that there will be no immediate changes and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State will address the environmental issues later.

Trading energy within Europe and being an entry point into Europe for the rest of the world has provided significant advantages. Europe has led the world on acting to address climate change. The economic imperative that drove those relationships has not changed and openness to trade remains central to who we are as a country. As the Prime Minister has repeatedly said, we will work towards the best deal for Britain. As I have said, our challenges remain the same: securing our energy supply, keeping bills low, building a low-carbon energy infrastructure, and protecting the environment and farming. Our commitment to them is unbowed.

1.40 pm

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): This is a good debate to be having and I thank the shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), and the Labour Front Bench team for giving us the opportunity. It is a shame, however, that the hon. Gentleman did not get beyond his introductory remarks in what was an excellent overview of the issues.

SNP history is being made today in that it is the first time that the full force of “Team Callum” has been deployed at the same time. We will hear later from my hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr)—or, as I like to call him, the junior member of the team.

Today’s debate feels a little bit like the last day of school. There is a little bit more work to do, but not a huge amount of Government work is going on as we discuss things, pick over the bones of Brexit and ask questions about how we go forward. I am sure that the Secretary of State is pleased—as we all are—that we have a new Prime Minister because that will help to ease some of the uncertainties that were building up and it is welcome that we will not have several weeks of uncertainty. I hope that the Government use the summer recess to come up with some plans, because plans are badly needed.

Last week, we discussed the excellent Energy and Climate Change Committee report on investor confidence and were able to discuss some of the issues affecting the sector that have been exacerbated by the Brexit vote. It is fair to say and it bears repeating time and again that Scotland did not vote for Brexit, and we will be doing everything in our power to ensure that we do not leave. We should change the lexicon slightly and refer either to “Exit” or perhaps “Wexit”. Scotland is not for leaving, and our Parliament and Government have united around keeping Scotland in the European Union. However, the uncertainty afflicting the United Kingdom following the vote will have some effects while we wait for clarity about our maintained position in the European Union

On energy bills, *The Guardian* reports today on uSwitch research suggesting that, since 23 June, 12 providers have pulled their cheapest fixed-rate tariffs and replaced them with more expensive deals. That is the impact of Brexit, which will be felt by consumers and those who can ill afford to pay more. The weak pound will have another cost impact as the UK is a net importer of electricity. Such things will drive up bills and are an unfortunate consequence of the Brexit vote. The future of interconnection is also uncertain. Interconnection is important and represents a valuable and sensible Government aim. I have often said that we should not see it as a way of importing cheap electricity from the continent, as the Secretary of State said in her “reset” speech; we should be using it to export electricity to the continent. We should be investing in domestic, low-carbon electricity generation, for which Scotland has immense and highly enviable potential.

The prospect of cheap electricity from the continent is also slightly questionable. Exchange rates will obviously change over time, but the assumptions about future interconnection decisions built into the sums might not look so good when the pound is not faring so well against the euro. Such things will come out in the wash, as we say in Scotland, but we need to look at energy policy and interconnection to see whether it is the right thing to do.

Hinkley is another big question about which we have had some discussion and it will come as no surprise to anyone on the Government Benches that the SNP is not in favour of it. We have discussed it ad nauseam, but it bears repeating that the economics of Hinkley were, in the views of my party, myself and a large number of people in the Chamber, highly dubious. The fundamental economics have only been undermined by the Brexit vote, and we need to reconsider them. We cannot afford to have all our eggs in this particular basket, because if it does not happen—I suspect it will not—there will be a rather large hole to be filled. We cannot, like we did with the Brexit vote, enter the unknown with no back-up plan.

Caroline Lucas: To give some shape to the hole that the hon. Gentleman mentions, does he agree that it is shocking that the expected fall in wholesale electricity prices has driven up the Government’s estimate of the whole lifetime cost of Hinkley to £37 billion from the £14 billion of only a year ago?

Callum McCaig: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. The costs are eye-watering. Given the extent to which Hinkley is an international project, the costs could rise even further still. It is time to have a sincere look at the plans and to decide whether the project is possible, but I strongly assume that it is not, so we require a back-up plan. If we do not address the huge strains on our energy system, the bread and butter of keeping the lights on will be put in jeopardy—perhaps not today but in the decades to come. It is incumbent upon the Government and the Department of Energy and Climate Change to act now.

We also need clarity from the Government on the position of the internal energy market in the European Union. The Vivid Economics report that was cited last week and again today about the potential of being outwith the system adding £500 million per annum to

the costs of our energy system is sobering. When DECC and the Government as a whole are engaged in their summer homework of working out how to get out of this particular pickle, I suggest that ensuring that we keep the co-operation of the IEM should be high up the agenda because it delivers for us here and for folks abroad. It will help us to meet the trilemma of energy costs and should not be sold down the river lightly.

To maintain security of supply, the time has come to scrap Hinkley and to invest in viable and cheaper forms of domestic energy, including onshore wind, on which we need to lift the embargo. We need the contract for difference auctions that the Secretary of State has mentioned. They should be as wide as possible, technology neutral—as they are supposed to be—and no one should be excluded from bidding. We need to get serious about building the suggested new gas plants, and I will make the case for Scotland again: if we can get the anomaly of transmission charging sorted, we are ready to go with gas plants in Scotland that will contribute significantly to reducing the forthcoming hole in energy production.

Above all, we need to invest in energy efficiency. The Scottish Government are doing strong work and that needs to be replicated right across these islands. If we are to deal with an ever more challenging set of energy circumstances, including where we get it from, the best way is to use less of it. The benefits for everyone are substantial in the long term.

On climate change, I agree with the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), who is no longer present, that it is regrettable that the UK will not be a member of the European Union. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for her role in the Paris talks, where the UK played a strong hand—perhaps not as strong as I and others would have liked, but it was played well and resulted in a pretty good deal. The fact we are no longer going to be at the heart of the decision-making process is regrettable, because the UK can be proud of what it has done on tackling climate change and has more it could offer the EU. We need to work out how that will happen in a renewed relationship with the EU, but there will be an absence and that is regrettable.

I have some specific questions to ask about what the process will be and what the impact of Brexit is on our commitments from the Paris talks, which have been touched upon. Our nationally defined contribution was the European Union's NDC, and I am not clear whether that still applies to us. I assume it does, as we are still a member, but we can and should do more. I am also unclear about some issues on the ratification of the deal. Do we have to ratify this before the Brexit deal is concluded? Is there an impact on the EU as a whole? I understand that the EU ratification process requires all member states to ratify before the EU can ratify it as a whole. Ultimately, the UN requires ratification by the 55 countries that account for 55% of the emissions. So are there implications for us? Are there implications for ratification by the EU? Are there implications for the whole deal if we are not able to do that?

Amber Rudd: I may not answer all the hon. Gentleman's questions in this intervention, but let me say, as I did not pick this up from the questions put by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) either, that we are pushing for early ratification of the Paris treaty on behalf of the United Kingdom.

Callum McCaig: I thank the Secretary of State for that intervention and very much welcome it; that is progress and I hope it can be done. I do not think there will be any opposition on that—none will come from Scottish National party Members.

I do not want to go through the negativities, but on the eve of the Paris summit we had the sweet and the sour. We had the sour on CCS, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell) referred. The sweet was the commitment from the Secretary of State and the Government on coal. That was welcome and it was a significant step forward, but are there questions about its deliverability now? I think that there are, as the commitment had a subtle caveat, which was that it would be done only if and when it was possible. The combination of the effects on investor confidence and the lack of clarity on a number of these things will make it more difficult to meet the conditions required to have that coal taken off the system. There is a requirement to look at that again. Above all, although we all welcome the fact that we are getting the fifth carbon budget and that it agreed with the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change, we do need the action plan. That is the fundamental thing; the bread and butter of this is how we do it. The ambition, determination and commitment is there, but it will come to be only if we have a viable plan. I do think this is achievable, but it has become more uncertain because of the Brexit vote.

In conclusion, yesterday's events probably put us in a better place than many of us expected to be in. We do not have the added unwelcome uncertainty of a nine-week leadership contest, but a power of work needs to be done by Government over the summer. I hope the Secretary of State continues in her post to do that. I look forward to continuing to work with her and to marking her homework after the summer recess.

1.53 pm

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in today's debate. Oppositions, being Oppositions, often fire questions at Governments and this is a particularly difficult time for a Government to answer all the questions. We are about to change Prime Minister, there will probably be a substantial reshuffle in the Government and Ministers will then get down to dealing with the consequences of what the British people have decided.

Many of the points made by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) were, "What's going to happen with regulations?" and, "What's going to happen with things we have signed up to?" I do not believe this Parliament is going to go through every piece of European legislation we have passed over the past 40 years and decide whether we want to keep it or not. The most likely outcome is enabling legislation that rolls everything we have agreed with the EU into UK legislation, with this Government and future Governments at their leisure then being able to pick through what they want to do. That is the most sensible approach. It may mean that we get rid of some legislation in some areas and in others we strengthen it. Whatever the outcome, this Parliament will make sure it picks what is best for our country. We must bear in mind that quite a lot of the legislation has been agreed with 27 other states. Some of it may not be that applicable or relevant to us, but there may be things where we want to improve standards. As my hon. Friend

[Mr Robert Syms]

the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) said, our environmental record on clean air and everything else predates our joining the EU, and the UK has often been more vociferous in these areas than many EU states.

Mary Creagh: The hon. Gentleman said that most of our air quality legislation predates the EU, but of course the Clean Air Act 1956 was all about stopping people burning things in London and creating the big smogs—it made no mention about diesel particulate matter, because diesel cars had not been invented then.

Mr Syms: Of course, things move on. My basic point is that just because we are out of the EU does not mean this Parliament cannot make sensible decisions about how to protect our citizens from things such as the hon. Lady mentions.

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Mr Syms: I shall make a little progress, if I may.

My guess is that we will have enabling legislation and we will deal at our leisure with the consequences of Britain leaving in terms of the detail and the European directives we have signed over the years, with this Government and future Governments determining their priorities.

I now wish to talk about energy. I am sure that when the Secretary of State was given her tasks the first thing the Prime Minister said to her was, “Don’t let the lights go out.” Given the capacity, the grid and demand, that is probably her principal concern in her job and it was probably the principal concern of her predecessors. I am pleased with many of the things that the Government have done, but we do have to increase capacity, and where I disagree with the comments from the SNP and others is on the fact that we do need nuclear capacity as part of that. Whether the deal is a good or bad one depends on crystal ball-gazing over the next 40 years as to what will happen with energy prices. They are terribly difficult to predict. All I predict is that they will go up and they will go down, but I do not know when. In the last Parliament, the Labour party had a policy of freezing energy prices, but the moment the party made that its policy, energy prices started to fall, which proved that freezing them was probably the worst thing to do. We all know that energy prices go up and down, and that that is to do with the market; it is not necessarily about our being in the EU.

I also caution colleagues against drawing any long-term conclusions from what has happened in the markets, given that it has been only about two weeks since we had a vote to leave the EU. Long-term interest rates have fallen, the pound has gone up and gone down, and markets have gone up and gone down. I suspect that over the next year or two there will be a bumpy ride in some markets as decisions have to be made on our future. The UK Government have to do our best to increase capacity, and that means nuclear power, more gas and fracking. I know a lot of people do not like fracking, but there is a natural resource that we have to make use of.

There is one area where I might have some disagreement with the Secretary of State. She mentioned running down some of the coal-fired power stations, but until we are certain that some of the investment is starting to kick in, I would be a little reluctant to close off some of that capacity, because it will be challenge for us to keep the lights on in the future. The problems we have in capacity are largely caused not by this Government or the coalition Government, but by the previous Labour Governments, who put off taking decisions. In particular, they had a White Paper that did not even include nuclear power. I welcome a lot of what the coalition Government did and what this Government have done, but we need to improve confidence and investment so that we have more capacity in the energy market.

I welcome a lot of what the Government have done. There is no reason why this country should not still be at the forefront of fighting environmental damage. I still think this country can provide lessons to the EU. I do not believe our leaving will be a disaster; it is a great opportunity for our country. We have to make it a success, and I am sure this Parliament is perfectly capable of making decisions that benefit our citizens rather more than some of those made in the EU.

1.59 pm

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms).

We have heard today that environmental problems do not respect borders. I would like to posit an alternative argument to the one just advanced by the hon. Gentleman, who said that everything was pretty much okay. I say that things are not that okay and that Britain’s membership of the EU has been instrumental and crucial to the improvement of UK air quality, the cleaning up of water pollution, the management of waste, and the protection and enhancement of biodiversity. It has also given us a global platform on which we can show global leadership in tackling climate change.

Earlier this year, the Environmental Audit Committee, which I chair—I can see several colleagues from it dotted around the Chamber here today—carried out an inquiry into the effects of EU membership on UK environmental protection. We heard from a wide variety of witnesses, including business people, academics, politicians and non-governmental organisations. The overwhelming majority told us that the environment was better protected as a result of our EU membership.

We do not have to look too far to find examples of that protection. In the 1970s, the Thames was biologically dead. It may not look any cleaner from the Palace of Westminster than it did in the ‘70s, but it serves as a great reminder of how EU membership has cleaned up our environment. We can now see seals and dolphins—I have yet to see one from my window. Otters are now in the high end of the Thames. That success story has been repeated up and down the country, as once dead rivers have been brought back to life. Where once it was dangerous to swim, now it is safe for people and wildlife alike. The EU water framework directive has cleaned up our beaches and our rivers, and the marine strategy directive has encouraged us to set out that ecologically coherent network of marine protection zones. It has not been an easy task and I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary

of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), for his work in this area.

Geraint Davies: Does my hon. Friend and colleague agree that one of the things that we found in the Committee's study was, in essence, that the European Union is a union, which therefore has minimum standards that are ratcheted up? It does not allow individual members to undercut other members on the environment, which means that there is a platform across Europe, and across the globe as well, of best practice.

Mary Creagh: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, but of course the setting of those minimum standards does not prevent individual member states from going above and beyond them. Vitally for business, it also provides a common baseline and a harmonised market for products. That is absolutely crucial for UK businesses as we move forward into the uncertainties of a Brexit world.

EU membership is also key for air quality. Successive Governments have dragged their feet on this very difficult issue. Since 2010, the UK has been in breach of EU legal air quality limits in 31 of its 43 clean air zones, and one of those is in my constituency of Wakefield. Although London tends to get all the attention—as a cyclist in London I am certainly aware of the very high pollution levels—constituencies such as Wakefield with the M1 and M62 crossing by it have severe burdens of cardiovascular disease and lung disease as a result of the breaching of those limits.

EU legislation has allowed UK campaigners to hold the Government to account. The High Court has ordered Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to come up with new air quality plans. In April, those Ministers were back in court over allegations that their plans were still insufficient to bring the UK's air quality in line with EU minimum standards. There is a series of question marks about what will happen to air pollution standards in the brave new Brexit world.

On biodiversity, the nature directives have preserved some of the most treasured places, plants and species in our country. Many of our best-loved sites, such as Flamborough Head, Dartmoor and Snowdonia, are protected by the EU.

Caroline Lucas: The birds and habitats directives are the real jewels in the crown of our environmental protection. Does the hon. Lady agree that, even if we do keep them in British legislation—as I hope we do—what we must do is ensure that there is a proper enforcement mechanism? That is what the EU has provided us with, and we will need to create a new enforcement mechanism that is as rigorous as possible.

Mary Creagh: I do not think that anything can be guaranteed in this world. The first step is to hear from Ministers, but it is said that today is like the last day of term. I wish the Under-Secretary well in whatever future role he is called on to play in the Government. He has been an excellent Minister, and he has appeared before the Environmental Audit Committee many times. I do not think that anything should be taken for granted. As a passionate pro-remain campaigner, I took part in many debates during the EU referendum campaign, and I heard many different versions of Brexit depending on whom I was debating with.

In an interview with *The Guardian*, the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) described the birds and habitats directives as “spirit crushing”. He said that if we voted to leave, “they would go”. We will have to see whether his version of events is the same as that of the new Prime Minister. He also said that leaving the EU would free up both common agricultural payments and up to £2 billion in “insurance and incentives” for farmers. Nowhere in that do I hear anything about the need for protecting species, wildlife, and plant life. There is no mention of the vital services provided by soils and bogs or of the need for the restoration of bogs and peatlands, which we recommended just a month ago in our excellent report on soil, and which was echoed this morning by the Adaptation Sub-Committee report of the Committee on Climate Change. So, we have seen otters, hen harriers and bitterns making a comeback, and the referendum result could put all that progress at risk.

The EU has also played a key role in promoting investment in sustainable businesses and technologies. Investors need clear policy signals emanating from strong legislative frameworks, and, to be fair, those frameworks are provided by the Climate Change Act 2015. However, our Committee has received some mixed messages from the current inquiries into both the Department for Transport and the Treasury. In particular, I posed a question on the cancellation of the carbon capture and storage competition, which has had a massive debilitating effect on investor confidence. We do not want to get into a position where consumers are not spending and investors are not investing, because that is absolutely disastrous not just for the economy, but for the UK's environmental progress.

Twenty years ago, in 1997, the UK sent almost all of our household waste to landfill. Now we recycle almost 45% of it, although I was disappointed to see those numbers slightly dip last year. The Treasury introduced the landfill tax escalator in response to the EU landfill directive. Over the past five years, according to the Environmental Services Association, the waste and resources management sector has invested £5 billion in new infrastructure thanks to this long-term policy signal. Those policy signals are vital as is the need to keep investing in infrastructure if we are to meet those 2020 waste targets—if they still apply in UK law. *[Interruption.]* A sip of gin to keep me going. A slice next time, please.

I shall end on the topic of microplastic pollution. The Committee is concluding its inquiry into microplastics—tiny particles of plastic, which can come from larger particles of plastic that are broken down, or from products such as shaving foams, deodorants, toothpastes and facial scrubs. Unfortunately, it seems to be the higher-end products that have not been cleaned up as quickly as the mass volume scrubs. We are finding that the particles have washed down the sink, passed through sewage filtration systems and ended up in the sea. Anyone who has had a dozen or half a dozen oysters recently will have consumed about 50 microplastic particles. For those of us who like seafood, that is something to reflect on. Bon appétit.

Over a third of fish in the English channel are now contaminated with microplastics. As an island nation we must take the problem of microplastic pollution seriously. The way to solve the problem is to work with

[Mary Creagh]

our partners in the EU. Those are not my words. It is what the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told our Committee when he gave evidence just before the referendum on 23 June. If the EU takes action to address an environmental problem, it creates not only a level playing field for businesses, but an opportunity to market environmental solutions.

Brexit raises a series of questions. There is the issue of the circular economy package, which is the EU's drive to get us to reduce waste, recycle more and have a secure and sustainable supply of raw materials, such as paper, glass and plastics. That would have driven new, green jobs in the UK economy. The decision to abandon all that has left investors reeling.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), the shadow Secretary of State, about Siemens' decision to freeze its investment in the wind industry in Yorkshire, Hull and the Humber and we face a protracted period of uncertainty. When the Under-Secretary of State appeared before our Committee as part of that EU inquiry, he told us that the vote to leave would result in a "long and tortuous" negotiation. That has not even begun yet.

The period ahead is fraught with risks. The UK risks not being regarded as a safe bet, and investors may no longer wish to invest their cash in UK businesses. Significantly, contracts are no longer being signed in London because the risk of London no longer being part of the European single market means that people want contracts to be signed in a European country so that if something goes wrong, contract law will be enforceable across all the countries of the European Union. That will have a very big effect on our financial and legal services.

Geraint Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that in the emerging recycling market across Europe, with us being at arm's length and possibly facing tariffs, regulations and so on, people will invest in Europe rather than in Britain?

Mary Creagh: That is the point I was making. When looking at where to put new foreign direct investment, investors will look again and go to the area of least risk. Those risks are reflected in the economy.

We found out from our inquiry that the environment and the UK's membership of the EU had been a two-way street. It forced us to take action much more quickly on waste and on water, but it also acted as a platform from which we could project our own British values, particularly in relation to climate change. DECC Minister Lord Bourne told the Committee that the UK's voice was louder in Paris because we were part of a club of 28 countries. I worry about the global agreement reached at Paris and the possible damage to achieving those climate change targets as a result of our withdrawing from the European Union.

In the 1970s the UK was the "dirty man" of Europe. Economically, we were the "sick man" of Europe. Since then we have cleaner beaches, we drive more fuel-efficient cars, we have more fuel-efficient vacuum cleaners, and we can hold the Government to account on air pollution. Environmental problems do not respect borders, and

require long-term solutions—much longer than the five-year term of a Government or, in some cases, the two-year term of a Treasury Minister.

EU membership has allowed the UK to be a world leader in tackling environmental problems with our brilliant science base and our pragmatic civil service to provide good nuts-and-bolts solutions to many of the challenges we face, and created British business as a world leader, whether through its retrofitting diesel buses in China or helping the Indian Government with water management for the Ganges delta. These are knowledge and services that our country can export proudly because we have been clean in the European Union. The result of the referendum has caused a great deal of political and economic uncertainty. I hope we will get some reassurances from the Government about the threats that it poses to our common home, and the actions that any new Government will take to ensure that we leave a better future for our children.

2.15 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), for whom I have a great deal of respect in her role as Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, although I would like to be a little more positive about life post-EU than she was.

I am pleased to speak about the important subject of post-EU referendum implications for energy and the environment. The environment is something that we cannot avoid. It affects us all: the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the soils that produce it, the trees that take in the carbon dioxide, the flora, the fauna, the landscape—everything we touch. It is essential that we deliver policies to determine that we can have a healthy life, and that all God's creatures can have a healthy life, too.

As we have heard many times today, much of our environmental legislation stems from Europe. We have been instrumental in writing much of it: the birds directive, the habitats directive, the bathing water directive and the air quality directive. The motion states that in the run-up to the EU referendum, "little mention" was made of environmental protection. Actually, a lot of people, including myself and some of my hon. Friends who are in the Chamber, as well as many from the Environmentalists for Europe group, did refer to environmental aspects. Interestingly, it was the media who gave the environment little coverage, as statistics show that the environment featured in only 1.7% of the referendum coverage in all media, and 0% of television coverage. People were talking about it, but that was not picked up, and that is one of the issues we face.

Once one starts talking about the environment, people engage with it, so I have set up an environment forum in Taunton Deane. I held a debate in the forum about the EU and the environment. Opinion was not in favour of one side or the other, but the event was a big talking point, and more than 100 people turned up to it, which shows that there is interest in the subject. We are where we are, however. We are out of Europe, and we have to move forward positively.

I shall mention a few small concerns that have arisen to show that we have some immediate problems to sort out. For example, I have been contacted by a number of

landowners who were about to sign their higher level stewardship contracts for the next 10 years to protect precious parts of our habitat, but they are now holding off. I would like some reassurance about what will happen and where the money that is required will come from. We do not want to lose those wonderful protected habitats while people wait to find out what happens. Similarly, on other greening issues for farmers, we do not want to risk farmers being forced to plough up field margins, edges or ponds because they do not know what is happening with their environmental protection money or where it is coming from. Some reassurance on that, even for the short term, would go down well.

Nobody today has mentioned farmers or landowners, but they are the people who own all the land that we keep talking about. We have to work with them. The same applies to fishermen. I have heard rumours—I do not know whether this is true—that fishermen are now ignoring many of the marine protections because they think that we are out of Europe and therefore the protections do not apply any more. It would be extremely helpful to hear some reassurance about that.

What now? As I said, we should be positive. We have a real opportunity to take ownership of the environment and to adopt the systems and frameworks that work best and deliver for us. Now more than ever—we have talked about this in the Environmental Audit Committee—is the time to start building in sustainability and a healthy future, and to think more about how every Department delivers on these things.

We should, for example, think about how infrastructure works when it goes through special landscapes or land with ancient trees. We should think about how our homes can be more sustainable. We have touched on all this, and I am pleased the Government are undertaking an inquiry to look again at sustainable urban drainage system, and the carbon efficiency and energy efficiency of homes, but we need to build those things in.

We should also think about how we reduce the impact of flooding. The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee is carrying out an inquiry into flooding, which will bring forward really useful ideas about how to build flood resilience into our land use plans. This is the time to get all these things in, so we have a great opportunity. We can also do more on low-carbon energy generation and transport so that we have lower emissions and reduce our terrible air pollution statistics. All that is possible with clear planning for and thought about land use.

I have talked to lots of bodies about these issues, from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, to the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, the Ancient Tree Forum and the Soil Association. However, I have also spoken to farmers and landowners, and I reiterate that we have to work with and support them if we are to deliver what we need.

I would like to suggest some things that we should consider. As the hon. Member for Wakefield said, EU legislation sets our targets regarding air and water pollution, and it was the EU that took us to task if we did not hit them. We must therefore ensure that we set targets and have a system of checking and reporting back—I suggest annually—on how we are doing. I urge the Government to ensure that we do not lower our air or water-quality standards. We have heard the shocking statistic that

50,000 people a year die from air pollution-related diseases, so we would be crazy to lower those standards. I am sure that the Minister is listening to that point.

I have a few thoughts about how to proceed, although some have been mentioned by other Members. Let us transpose the relevant EU directives into UK law—we can then amend them as we think fit, but let us at least have them—and let us keep special areas of conservation. Let us also do more on the world stage, because we really need to. We need to increase our global influence with bodies such as the UN and the OECD. The Bern convention and the animal welfare legislation are really important, and we also need to stay part of Natura 2000.

I applaud the fact that DEFRA has been working away on its—I will not say elusive—25-year plans for farming and the environment. That is excellent, but let us see those plans as soon as possible, and let us make sure that the environment is inextricably interwoven with farming production targets. We have a great opportunity, so let us make greening slightly less complicated for farmers. Most farmers are keen to undertake aspects of greening, but some of the forms that they have to fill out and the demands that are placed on them are so tortuously complicated—I heard this only this morning from a barn owl expert who works with farmers across the south-west—that some farmers are thinking of not bothering in the future if we cannot simplify the system. To deliver what we need to deliver, we need to make things easy to do.

While we are rewriting our plans, let us get in some soil monitoring. Let us recognise that soil is an ecosystem, not just a growing medium to be abused. Let us also deal with the circular economy. DEFRA suggests that that could bring in £22 billion of savings, so let us look at that and build it all in.

I reiterate that subsidies will have to be part of the system, but let us work out how they are given to our farmers and landowners. I suggest that they should not just be based on land ownership, but that farmers and landowners should have to deliver something for them, whether that is green services or food production. Perhaps caps should be put in place. If someone has 3,000 acres of arable land in the east, is it right that they clock up so much per hectare? Why not have a cap so that everything is on a level playing field? Farmers and landowners are discussing these issues countrywide, as are environmental organisations, so let us put all their findings together and build them into our forward-thinking plan.

Finally, I am going to touch on energy, because it is referred to in the motion. I am pleased that the Energy Secretary has committed to delivering secure, affordable and clean energy. I welcome the system that is enabling consumers to switch to lower-cost energy to help with bills. I really welcome the commitment to continue leading on climate change, to which many colleagues have referred. I also welcome early ratification of the Paris agreement, and I reiterate praise for the proposed climate change system, which the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) referred to, so I think we are all together on that.

The Government have committed to low-carbon energy. They are phasing out coal and are also committed to nuclear. The south-west is pressing ahead with the commitment on Hinkley Point, which will be a crucial part of our economy, delivering 7% of our energy. I

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welcome the Government's involvement in establishing the National College for Nuclear, and there will be a big spin-off for Somerset, where Bridgwater College has just linked up with Somerset College in my constituency. That is spawning not only new engineers, but the new skills that we will need to move forward in the low-carbon energy sector that has to be part of our brave new world.

To conclude, let us not be negative. The Government must listen—I am absolutely sure that they are listening. We must link farming closely with the environment for the good of the nation. That will deliver for the environment and, indeed, for us all, in terms of health, wellbeing and life chances.

2.26 pm

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for graciously allowing me to make my maiden speech in this really important debate.

I am deeply honoured to be standing in this Chamber as the new Member of Parliament for Tooting. When I think about this Chamber's long and proud history, and about the women and men who have sat here before me, and all they have achieved, I feel humbled. They include Clement Attlee, Nye Bevan and, very recently, Jo Cox, to name but a few. I am also reminded of the vast responsibilities that we in this Chamber are entrusted with over the coming years and the magnitude of what we must achieve for our country. I would like to talk a little about that task and about the mindset with which we should approach it.

First, however, I would like to talk about where I come from—Tooting. It is hard for me to adequately express my gratitude to the people of Tooting for putting their trust in me. During my campaign, I said I would be a passionate, energetic and tireless representative for absolutely everyone in my constituency, and it is with that promise that I intend to serve.

Just two months ago, I was working day and night on our NHS frontline in A&E as an emergency doctor. Now I find myself wandering the corridors of Westminster, grappling with vast piles of dry booklets and mistaking Members' offices for lady Members' rooms—it has happened.

It was a piece of good news that set me on the journey that brings me here today: the election of our new Mayor of London, my good friend Sadiq Khan, with the largest personal mandate in British political history. From the first time I met Sadiq, it was clear that he was destined for greatness. When I became a councillor, he took the time to offer me support and guidance, as he remembered well what it was like for someone to suddenly find themselves holding the responsibilities of elected office. Sadiq spent 11 years working tirelessly for the people of Tooting. His commitment to equality, justice and inclusivity is inspirational. Whether he is celebrating International Women's Day year after year, breaking bread with every religious community, or talking to children about how they can achieve no matter what their background, Sadiq's interactions are always warm and welcoming. He truly believes in the power of people and communities, as he has shown throughout his time representing Tooting—and now the great city of London.

He has made improving the environment a top priority in City Hall, and has already started tackling the important issue of air quality in London. This debate gives us an opportunity again to see what a difference we can make in the House when we get legislation right—legislation like the Clean Air Act 1956, which was passed 60 years ago following the London smogs of the 1950s.

I will endeavour to build upon Sadiq's fine legacy, standing tall for all of Tooting. Sadiq's shoes are big to fill, but then I have the benefit of much higher heels to help! We share a lot in our histories and our characters: our surname; a love of football; and a keen interest in boxing. Perhaps most importantly, Sadiq and I are children of Tooting who are now choosing to raise our families in the very streets where we grew up. We have one important difference, though: my dad was not a bus driver—[*Laughter.*] However, my mum did work in the local petrol station, so—who knows?—perhaps Sadiq's father filled up his bus there.

As a Tooting girl through and through, I never like it when people say, "Tooting is becoming a fantastic place to live." Anyone who has lived there for as long as I have knows that it has always been great, with the wonderful green open spaces of Tooting and Wandsworth commons, the iconic Tooting market, and the lido, which has been open for residents of Tooting to swim outdoors for 110 years. There has always been a rich tapestry of communities living harmoniously alongside one another. That unity should be celebrated, and I will defend it with every fibre of my being. That unity is woven into me—it is an essential part of who I am. When people ask me where I am from, I say: "I'm half Polish, half Pakistani; raised in England; married a Welshman; and I am 100% Tooting."

There is a serious point in this, though: what binds us together. In Tooting and across the country, it is a sense of common purpose. The selflessness that drives community groups and charities binds us together. Tooting's many local businesses, traditional and modern, not only fuel our thriving economy, but bind us together. St George's hospital and our NHS, where everyone is treated with equal concern, based not on their race or religion but on their need, bind us together. In these fragile times, we should never forget that these charities, businesses and proud national institutions are important not only because they provide us a service or grow our economy, but because they bind us together as local residents, as citizens, and as human beings, too.

So why am I here now? Well, life was not easy growing up, but I always had the bedrock that was the love and support of my mum, Maria, even in the face of adversity. She was on her own, a single mum, but like a small army, showering my brother and me with praise and providing a palpable sense of possibility. She gave me hope. She showed my brother and me that even people from our background can achieve anything with hard work and determination. She instilled in me a deep-rooted determination to help others who have seen hardship and who fight for social justice. But I am also here because of Labour. My dream of becoming a doctor became a reality not only through my own hard work and support from my family, but because a Labour Government made it financially possible for me to access a world-class medical school at Cambridge. That

is one reason why my ambition will always be for Labour to win power, not just to sit on these Opposition Benches.

I have served in an ice cream shop, I have fried eggs at a hotel, and I have aided patients, but my proudest job is being a wife and a mother. My heart bursts with the love I have for my husband, Tudor, and my two young daughters, Anaiyah, aged three, and Layla, aged just one. They are an immense source of strength to me, and will continue to be so over the coming years.

We must now all look to those coming years. They will be turbulent and challenging, and in them history will be made. This House will be responsible for shaping Britain's future in the 21st century by guiding, overseeing, and providing accountability for the most important negotiations our country will have seen for decades. In that period, important and defining questions will be asked about who we are as a nation and who we want to be, about the legacy we will leave the next generation and the generations after that, and about the relationships we want to have with our friends and allies across the whole world.

Britain has always been an outward-looking country—one that does not shy away from the challenges that face us all. My experience as a doctor, and internationally all over the world, has taught me a lot about those challenges. I have lived and worked in squalid refugee camps, pulled dead bodies out of floodwater and watched children suffer as victims of war. I have witnessed aching, aching suffering. My commitment is to be a voice for those who have none, to find hope for those who have lost it, and to build strength for those who are weak, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. We all bleed, we all breathe, and we all feel pain. The sound of a parent losing a child is an international language. It is, tragically, a sound that is increasingly common in our unstable world.

We live in a time of insecurity and change without parallel in recent history. Europe is in flux. The middle east is in crisis. The axis of global power is shifting. The old certainties no longer seem so certain. It is all too easy to write off calls for international social justice as irrelevant when we ourselves live in such difficult and uncertain times—“We have so much to do to sort out our own country; why should we be thinking about responsibilities overseas?” That is to misunderstand what social justice is about. It is not simply a goal to be ranked and prioritised in relation to other goals; it is about how we think and who we are. It applies to everything we do, whether protecting our NHS in the UK, protecting workers' rights in our negotiations with the EU, or working to seek peace in Syria and Yemen. Everywhere I look, there is work to do.

Here at home, I pledge to bring my years of experience in, and deep commitment to, our NHS in order to stand up for it. I could not be prouder of my NHS colleagues at St George's hospital and elsewhere who work day and night, with little thanks for the work they do. Anyone who has worked in the NHS—indeed, anyone who has worked in any of our vital emergency services—knows well the feeling of leaving behind the comfort of home and family, day after day, night after night, selflessly to work gruelling hours in difficult circumstances, and serving the communities we love without complaint. I will work to protect them from the attacks they are under. Our NHS staff see work as a vocation, not as a

job. This is why they have been so damaged by the recent mishandling of the junior doctors contract, and it is why nurses are so distraught when they see their bursaries axed. It is morally reprehensible that student nurses are forced to seek food banks, or that women in medicine are penalised for having children.

I have already asked two questions in my short time in this House, and I am afraid I shall not stop asking questions until I get satisfactory answers. In these times, who knows how long I may be sitting here? What I do know, and what I can tell Members, is that I am going to make every single minute, every single day, count for the people of Tooting, and of Great Britain and the United Kingdom.

2.38 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): What an absolutely fantastic, brilliant maiden speech we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan). I have served in this House for 14 years, and I have to say that that is the best maiden speech I have ever heard. It was eloquent, moving and witty. It talked about Tooting, about history, and about where we are and where we are going. My hon. Friend is a great credit to Tooting, and a great credit to her family. I know that her mother, Maria, is here, as are her brother, her best friend, Monique, her husband, Tudor, who I am very pleased to hear is from Neath in Wales—I hope to be sharing a Joe's ice cream later in the summer if all goes well—and her supporters in the Gallery. [HON. MEMBERS: “And the Mayor of London.”] I will be mentioning the Mayor of London. It is fantastic to hear about Tooting and it is great to have the Mayor of London back with us today.

This debate is about the environment. Our concern as we break free from Europe is that we will no longer have mandatory standards of air quality. I am very proud that Sadiq Khan, our Mayor of London, has made headway after two terms of, frankly, indolence from the previous Mayor in terms of making progress on air quality. There are about 9,500 premature deaths a year in London alone as a result of air pollution, largely from diesel cars and vehicles. The number across Britain, according to the Royal College of Physicians, is 40,000. We are talking about lung disease, heart disease and strokes, and problems for children, whether they are in the classroom or in the womb.

I am very pleased that Sadiq Khan is present. I was with him last week when he launched his new air quality standards on the 60th anniversary of the Clean Air Act 1956, and I look forward to ultra-low emissions zones using the latest technology. The Minister may know of the new technology from America that uses lasers to count the emissions of each pollutant from each car, thereby setting standards for emissions standards.

One of my main concerns about leaving Europe is that mandatory standards will no longer be enforceable in the courts. I am glad that ClientEarth is taking the Government to court to ensure that we deliver those standards. The fact that it has to take them to court shows that, left to our own devices, we are in danger of becoming the dirty man of Europe again, which was our embarrassing former status. The World Health Organisation has standards, but they are not enforceable. I hope that the Minister will say that we will sustain and

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honour our commitments not just to air quality standards, but to all EU standards. We have a responsibility to make future laws ourselves, but unless they are integrated and harmonious they will not work as a platform to make the world a more sustainable place.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My hon. Friend has touched on the important issue of the fines levied for breaches of air quality standards. Does he think that there is an important job to be done in terms of joined-up government? The British Government will pass the fines down to local government, even though issues such as local government housing targets are also controlled by central Government. That means that not only will local government have to approve new developments in areas of towns and cities that suffer from poor air quality, but the British Government will pass down fines to it for doing so.

Geraint Davies: That is a concern. I promoted the Air Quality (Diesel Emissions in Urban Centres) Bill to give more powers to local authorities, with Government support, to introduce more air quality zones and testing, and to encourage the use of trams and hydrogen and electric-driven transport systems. We need not just a series of zones that have to reach minimum standards, but improved air quality for all people across all our nations. We do not want the Government to pass the buck or to revert to becoming the dirty man of Europe again. We have had a lot of benefits from being in Europe. My constituency of Swansea West has some beautiful, blue flag beaches, and we do not want them to revert to becoming like the old low-tar and high-tar beaches of the past.

Responsibility for research and development in environmental innovation is shared across Europe, but we are in danger of risking that. We were leaders at Kyoto from Europe, and we were leaders in Britain and throughout Europe on the elimination of chlorofluorocarbons and on closing the hole in the ozone layer. We do not want to miss such opportunities in future, but I am sad to say that we are likely to do so.

The Adaptation Sub-Committee of the Committee on Climate Change had a meeting today to discuss the latest problems with adaptation to climate change, including what we have to do in relation to flooding and changes in biodiversity, water supply, health, food and so on. We need to face those big challenges together, so I hope that the Minister will reassure us that we will be working together, not just floating off on our own and becoming worse and worse environmentally.

The environment faces challenges from the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the EU and the US. Now that we are leaving, we will find that we cannot veto, influence or change those negotiations; we will be a bystander and we will have to live by those rules, which at the moment do not protect the environment from investors. We run the risk of being fined by big fracking companies. Loan Pine sued Canada for hundreds of millions of dollars when there was a moratorium on fracking in Quebec. I do not want that to happen in Wales, Scotland or elsewhere when companies are given the open door by the new Administration.

I am pleased and honoured to be a member of the Council of Europe. I am a rapporteur on both TTIP and fracking, and I hope that the advice from the thorough reports will be taken up by the Government. I am glad to say that I am also a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, and we have said that working together as one with Europe has to be good to retain standards. We do not want to see us undercutting other countries with regard to the environment for competitive reasons, which would bring everybody down.

On climate change, it was agreed in Paris that we should set a target, using the 1750 baseline, for our world temperatures to go up by no more than 2 °C. We have already moved up 1 °C, and, on the basis of carbon dioxide that is in the pipeline, it has been calculated that the figure is already 1.5 °C up, which was the Paris aspiration. That means that we need to move towards zero-carbon technology and carbon capture. Regrettably and shamefully, however, the Government, even before leaving Europe, have abandoned their aspirations and plans for carbon capture. As an environmentalist, I am really concerned not just that we will become the dirty man of Europe, but that we will start playing dirty to reduce standards in order to attract jobs as we face tariffs, which is one of the inevitable consequences of the Brexit vote.

I will present a Bill tomorrow on UK environmental protection and the maintenance of EU standards. It gives the Government the opportunity to sign up to at least keeping the current standards and to not sink back while the EU moves forwards. I hope that that will be agreed.

I view the vote for Brexit with great regret. I hope that we will have a second referendum on the exit package, so that people will know precisely what they are voting for, and if it does not deliver on their reasonable expectations they will have the option of defaulting back to recover membership of the EU again. We will see how it goes. Government Members are shaking their heads, but I do not think that we should continue to walk into what may be an environmental disaster.

Finally, I want to say once more that the hon. Member for Tooting made a fantastic speech.

2.48 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It was a pleasure to hear the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), whose speech was excellent, in both content and delivery. My son is a junior hospital doctor and I know how hard doctors work. We need more scientists and doctors in the House of Commons, so for that reason, too, she is really welcome. I congratulate her.

The implication of the Opposition's motion is that somehow, by leaving the EU, we will become the dirty man of Europe and that, without the glad hand of European legislation, we will go back to our dirty ways.

I want to talk about climate change police, particularly how far ahead we are of the rest of the EU, and how Europe's slow pace is causing increasing difficulty for the rest of the world.

People are right that environmental protection and policy is cross-border. We produce 1.3% of global emissions. Since 1990, the UK has decreased its carbon emissions by 28% and the EU has decreased carbon emissions by 21%. That figure includes our contribution of 28%,

so the rest of the members have done a bit worse; although that in itself is not a disaster. What is extraordinary is the variability between different countries in Europe on carbon emissions since 1990: Austria has increased emissions by 14%, Ireland by 7% and Poland by 14%; Germany has decreased emissions, but not by anything like as much as we have. It is really quite bizarre.

Quite often, people talk about countries such as China as being the issue when it comes to emissions. However, the reality is that the Chinese are taking the whole issue a great deal more seriously than a number of OECD countries are. China has 40 to 50 nuclear power stations under construction. It increased its proportion of energy from nuclear by 30% last year, and from renewables by 20%. That is a huge effort. The truth is—

Philip Boswell: I take the hon. Gentleman's point that China is making commendable progress in respect of nuclear construction. However, is it not also the case that, along with India, it is constructing up to several thousand coal-fired power stations? The argument, as was well put by the Prime Minister of India, Mr Modi, is this: why should we come to the banquet, have only a dessert and be presented with the bill?

David Mowat: I have a lot of sympathy for that argument, and that is why we have to cut more slack for these developing countries. I am going to come on to talk about coal, but in November the Secretary of State in this country said that we were going to phase out coal by 2025. The following week, Germany commissioned a brand new lignite-burning power station. That sort of behaviour plays to the point just made by the hon. Member from the Scottish nationalists that it is very hard to lecture the Indians and the Chinese on coal when there are countries in Europe, this year, commissioning brand new coal power stations.

We have talked about how important Paris is. The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) made the point that we may well be close to 1.5% anyway—it is a statistical model and it is quite hard to tell. However, the fact is that the INDC that the EU, including the UK, put into the Paris commitment is approximately half as onerous in terms of decarbonisation as that which the Climate Change Act 2008 requires us to do in the UK. We will reduce our emissions by the fifth carbon budget by 57% in 2030. The EU offering was a 40% reduction, which includes the UK's 57%. We are seeing the result of this already. Last year, carbon emissions across the EU as a whole increased by 0.7%. I accept that that was only one year, and that this is not something to be looked at one year at a time, but 18 of the 28 countries in the EU either had no decrease in emissions or an increase. For completeness, in that same time the UK reduced its emissions by around 3%. Those statistics are from Eurostat.

I want to talk more widely about why it is that the EU has lost its way on climate policy. There is a fixation on coal in the EU. Germany is often regarded as being a leader on renewables, and it is; Germany has far more renewables than we have. However, it also has much higher carbon emissions than we do. The reason for that is the coal that it has: Germany has four times as much coal as the UK, and it is not four times more populous. There are parallels in other countries. Does it

matter? Perhaps not, in one sense; someone has to lead, and it is us. However, the DECC website shows that electricity prices in the UK for domestic consumers are something like 50% above the EU mean—our gas prices are not—and our industrial prices are about 80% higher. Why does that matter? I come from a constituency in the north of England, where we still try to manufacture things. It is very hard to talk about rebalancing the economy and the northern powerhouse on the back of differentially high energy prices.

I do not think that the EU has taken the position that it has on purpose. So why is it that the policy objectives of reducing carbon have not been realised? The first error that was made—this is true of a lot of directives—is that there was confusion as to the target. A lot of the early EU directives were about renewables and not decarbonisation, which is a secondary target. The consequence is that CCS, which we have talked about, was not emphasised, gas as a transition fuel was not emphasised and nuclear was not emphasised—the biggest omission of all. Of all EU electricity, 30% comes from nuclear. The fact that, for many countries in the EU, that is not even regarded as part of the solution is quite bizarre.

Two or three hon. Members this afternoon talked about CCS, and I regret that the UK is not pushing ahead with that. However, it really beggars belief to say that that is a European issue when a number of countries in the EU, including Germany, have banned CCS. It is not a question of not developing it; they have banned it.

The other error that the EU has made is to create a general parity between different types of fossil fuels. Coal and gas are very different indeed in terms of their materiality on this. One reason why the UK does a lot better than the EU is the amount of gas that we use and the fact that we have displaced coal with gas. I like to quote this statistic: if the world were to replace all the coal that we currently burn with gas, that would be equivalent to five times, or a factor of 500%, more renewables. To pretend that that is not part of the solution is just plain wrong. One reason that people regard it as not being part of the solution is that the pathway has been mistaken for the objective.

Yes, at some point we need to get to an emissions level below that which is afforded by gas, but the truth is that emissions are cumulative. The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) said that we may well be close to the 1.5% in terms of particulates and all that goes with them. That is true and it is a cumulative effect. Carbon does not go out of the atmosphere for a very long time. It is not just about pathway. For that reason, gas should have been far more of a factor in this than it has been.

Geraint Davies: On the related matter of where we are, is the hon. Member as concerned as I am about the leakages of methane from fracking, which are 5%, given that methane is 83 times worse than CO₂ in global warming?

David Mowat: I recognise the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. If methane were being released from fracking at that level, it would represent that percentage. However, I do not think that that is the case in the United States of America. I am prepared to be corrected

[David Mowat]

on that, but I do not think anything like that amount of methane is being emitted by fracking in the United States of America.

Geraint Davies: I can provide the hon. Member with satellite evidence of this. The figure is somewhere between 3% and 8%, with the best judgment being that it is 5%. That makes it two and a half times worse than coal in terms of global warming.

David Mowat: I do not accept that that is true, but if it was, it would apply to fracked gas only and not gas generally. Most of our gas is liquefied natural gas from Norway and Russia. That said, various papers have been written on the amount of methane coming out of wells in the United States, and I do not think that the evidence is quite as the hon. Gentleman said. I think we should leave it at that for now, and maybe have a coffee afterwards.

The other thing that was not done was that the EU has no price for carbon. The emissions trading system was an attempt to put in place a price for carbon. However, because of the recession, carbon permits became very cheap indeed and it became no issue at all. We in the UK then established a carbon floor price. The EU Parliament debated that and it was blocked by MEPs, particularly those from Germany, so there is no price of carbon in the EU, which would have fixed some of this.

The result of all this is a policy that overly emphasises renewables as a solution, without taking into account some of the other things that we could have been doing, such as nuclear, CCS and the displacement of coal with gas. Result: we see in Germany a country with very high renewables, but also very high carbon emissions. Something like 15% of Germany's total energy and 30% of its electricity come from renewables, but because of the amount of coal it produces, its carbon emissions are a third higher per unit of GDP and a third higher per capita than those of the UK.

So, there is an issue with our leaving the EU. It is not an issue of us learning from the EU how to reduce carbon emissions; it is a question of the EU not being held to account for the level of emissions that many of those countries are currently going on with. If Brexit has got a downside in terms of environmental policy around climate change, it is that the leadership that the UK has been able to demonstrate—so far, perhaps unsuccessfully—to the EU on climate targets will not necessarily be so evident in future.

3 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was immensely frustrating to me that the environment received so little attention during the referendum campaign, despite the best efforts of my fellow members of the steering group of the cross-party Environmentalists for Europe. It seems like a lifetime ago that I stood on a rather windswept beach in Hove with my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle), the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), and Sir Stanley Johnson, the father of the hon. Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for Orpington

(Joseph Johnson), brandishing a beach ball and exhorting people to remain for nature. Brighton and Hove voted to remain, and I am sure that that was entirely down to our efforts with the beach ball that day. I am proud, too, that my constituency voted to remain. The public voted narrowly for Brexit, however, although I do not believe that they voted to remove the environmental protections that have served us so well over the years.

Much that is good has flowed from our EU membership. As my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) and others have said, Britain was once dubbed the “dirty man of Europe”. We used to worry about acid rain, but our sulphur dioxide emissions fell by 89% between 1990 and 2010, and our nitrogen dioxide emissions were down 62% thanks to EU directives, the EU ban on leaded petrol and the requirement for catalytic converters in cars.

Andrew Gwynne: I represent a constituency that has an air quality management area. My hon. Friend will know that there is a public health issue here in respect of obtaining clean air. Does she think that it is incumbent on the Government to tackle the air quality issue so that we narrow the health inequalities that are endemic in constituencies such as mine?

Kerry McCarthy: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Sixty years on from the Clean Air Act 1956, it is clear that many urban areas, in particular—although not just urban areas—are still suffering greatly from air pollution. It is an issue of social justice, because people in poorer communities tend to be most affected. The Government have been taken to court on the matter by ClientEarth and, whether we are in the European Union or outside it, we need to see further action on the issue.

It is hard to believe that we used to allow untreated sewage to flow into our seas before the EU's bathing water directive forced the UK Government to make our bathing waters fit for swimming and to test for bacteria such as *E. coli*. In 1990, only 27% of our bathing waters met minimum mandatory standards. By 2014, 99% complied. The EU's waste framework directive has been the driving force behind our domestic waste policy, requiring us to recycle 50% of household waste by 2020. As we have heard, it looks as though the UK is moving slightly backwards when it comes to progress towards recycling targets, and that needs to be halted.

The nature directive protects our most threatened habitats and birds, with beauty spots such as the New Forest, the Brecon Beacons and Ben Nevis designated as special areas of conservation. Post-Brexit, many of those protections would still apply in certain scenarios, but not in others. There is a lot of uncertainty, and I am keen to hear some early indications from the Minister of what our negotiating stance will be, as well as some reassurance about the importance of such protections. My understanding is that if the UK were to negotiate membership of the EEA, most EU environmental legislation would continue to apply, including measures covering pollution control, chemicals and waste management but not the bathing water directive or the birds and habitats directive. If the UK were outside the EEA, most environmental legislation would cease to apply. The main exception would be when companies sought to export to the EU; they would be obliged to conform to product standards and other requirements in order to do so.

Many EU directives have been transposed into UK law through primary or secondary legislation under Acts other than the European Communities Act 1972, and that legislation would continue to apply until it was changed by Parliament. EU regulations would present a different problem for the Government, however. They are directly applicable in the member states, so they could immediately cease to apply. A thorough audit must be carried out and clear guidance given to the House and the general public—who felt, throughout the referendum campaign, as though they did not really have the information that they needed to make the momentous decision that lay before them—about what protections could be under threat in each possible scenario, so that they can make up their minds about which of the scenarios they ought to support. We also need to know what the Government intend to do in each case.

There are, however, serious doubts about DEFRA's capacity to do that. We know that the Department was woefully unprepared for a Brexit result; the Secretary of State told us that there was no plan B. The coalition Government slashed DEFRA's resource budget by 38%, and the Chancellor last year announced a further cut of 15% for this Parliament. DEFRA and its agencies have lost a quarter of their staff. I hope the Minister will be able to tell us how the Department will begin to review and untangle EU directives and regulations when we know it does not have sufficient staff or resources for even its day-to-day work.

I urge the Government to bring in experts from outside Parliament—for example, Professor Tim Lang and the Food Research Collaboration—who are already gathering ideas, meeting, discussing and trying to collate a strategy for how we should proceed. We need to know from the Minister which civil servants from DEFRA and DECC will take part in the EU unit led by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), and what their remit will be.

I am concerned that if some in the Government have their way, we will have a bonfire of protections. Some of the most prominent leave campaigners are also climate change deniers, and there has also been much anti-EU rhetoric over the years, casting environmental protections as an over-bureaucratic burden rather than a benefit. The Chancellor, before he became an EU enthusiast, tried to claim that those protections placed

“ridiculous costs on British businesses”—[*Official Report*, 29 November 2011; Vol. 536, c. 808.]

but the Government's review proved him wrong.

During the referendum campaign, the Minister with responsibility for farming, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), vowed that the nature directives would go after Brexit. He described them as “spirit-crushing green directives”—although, to be fair to him, he later said that that comment was slightly misrepresented. He also said that the marine strategy framework directive, which requires member states to achieve good environmental status in marine waters by 2020 and promote a more sustainable approach to marine-related economic and social activities, would go. We need reassurance from the Minister that those voices will not prevail in the post-Brexit scenario.

The European Commission's “fitness check” of the directives and, tellingly, their regulatory burden, is due to report soon. In the largest response ever to an EU

consultation, more than 500,000 people called for the nature laws to be kept and to be better enforced. More than 100,000 of those responses came from UK citizens. British organisations such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have been instrumental in defending the directives, not just in the UK but across Europe.

Another example of the European Union discussing issues that affect the UK—it is not a question of legally binding obligations being imposed on us, but we certainly ought to be part of the negotiations—is the EU circular economy package, which was agreed at the end of last year. There have already been reports that during the negotiations, the UK tried to water down the package, arguing against mandatory targets and priding ourselves on inserting the word “voluntary” throughout the text. Scotland has brought forward national plans to implement the package, and Wales has its own blueprint for moving to a more circular economy. What will England do now? If the EU circular economy package is properly implemented—that is quite a big “if”—the potential for new jobs and innovative new lines of business is huge. I would like the Minister to reassure us that we will not allow Brexit to derail our progress.

A further example is the neonicotinoids ban. The European Food Safety Authority is reviewing the EU's restrictions on the use of neonics and the latest scientific evidence of their harm to bees and other pollinators. Its assessment will inform whether changes should be made to current EU restrictions and, indeed, whether they should be extended to cover all crops. Will the UK base its view on future regulation on the EFSA assessment? Or, since those restrictions were only introduced in the first place thanks to the EU, do the Government see that as an opportunity—as the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) does—for overturning the current ban?

I also want to mention the impact on farmers and the managed environment. The common agricultural policy is far from perfect, but it is a lifeline for British farmers—around 55% of their income comes from EU subsidies. Britain's lack of food self-sufficiency, which now stands at 61%, makes us overexposed and vulnerable to Brexit. As most experts are agreed that prices for imported food are likely to rise, we will have real difficulties offsetting that with more, much needed British-grown food, given how reliant the sector is on free movement of labour from within the EU and on migrant labour—I think I am right to say that 38% of workers in the food and farming sector come from outside the UK, and their situation is much in doubt in a post-Brexit scenario.

The leave campaign promised that a post-Brexit UK Government would be more generous to farmers, but we know that the UK lobbied for cuts to CAP support. We also know that the UK had the option of transferring 15% spending to pillar two for rural development, but only opted for 12.5% modulation, showing worrying signs about the possible direction of travel.

There are already too many examples of the Government not meeting EU requirements. As I have said, they had to be taken to court by ClientEarth for breaching EU clean air laws, as well as by the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Angling Trust over their failure to protect our rivers, lakes and coastal areas from agricultural pollution. The water framework directive required “good” ecological status by 2015 in all water bodies, but only 19% of those bodies currently comply. Some beaches

[Kerry McCarthy]

have been de-designated by the Government so that they do not have to warn swimmers about poor water quality or test the waters.

Finally, some people were worried that by staying in the EU we would end up as a signatory to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and that our hard-won environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards could be compromised as a result. For example, the EU does not allow hormone-pumped meat, but the US does. What happens now? Just when the EU looks as if it will resist TTIP—signals from France and Germany suggest that it will do so in its current form—will Brexit mean that the UK Government end up negotiating a bilateral trade deal with the US? If so, will our much weaker bargaining position mean that we cede ground on those important standards? Rather than “taking back control”, bilateral negotiations with the US could leave us with even less control. With so many unanswered questions, and faced with losing EU protections, Ministers need to assure us that Brexit will not mean environmental degradation and pollution spiralling out of control.

3.12 pm

Calum Kerr (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. As well as having a fantastically named constituency—it is much easier to remember than Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk—the new hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) did herself proud and stood tall for Tooting today. There were so many Labour MPs on the Benches around her that I wondered whether she was going to make a bid for her party's leadership.

I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig)—the other half, as he claims, of Team Callum. He failed to mention that he calls himself Callum 2.0. He is taller and has more hair, but anyone who can see his shoes knows that there are clearly some flaws in the design.

Callum McCaig: We need a 3.0.

Calum Kerr: We do, absolutely.

This has been an excellent debate—it is a shame that we did not have more such debates prior to the referendum. SNP Members did everything in our power to promote the case for the UK remaining in the European Union, and a key part of that was about keeping the protections that EU legislation has brought in the workplace, and on human rights and the environment. Unfortunately, those issues were too often brushed aside in the fierce political contest that we experienced during the referendum. Indeed, as we have heard, the environment scarcely featured in the debate about Britain's membership of the EU.

The environmental protections that we have enjoyed in this country for decades, which cover areas such as air and water quality, emissions, waste, chemical regulation, and habitat protection, are all underpinned by EU legislation. Britain's membership of the European Union has had an extremely positive effect on the quality of Britain's beaches, our water and rivers, and on the air that we breathe. It has underpinned protection for many of our rarest birds, plants and animals, and their habitats.

Like so many other questions on the detail of Brexit, the question of how we will continue to protect those precious assets needs a coherent answer.

Whenever we look at an issue in more detail, the value of European collaboration becomes clear. As the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) told the country just days after encouraging us to vote to leave:

“There will still be intense and intensifying European cooperation and partnership in a huge number of fields: the arts, the sciences, the universities, and on improving the environment.”

It is not clear how that picture of intensifying European co-operation squares with the Home Secretary's statement yesterday that “Brexit means Brexit”.

On matters that stretch across a range of different fields that are vital to our prosperity and wellbeing, there has been little more than evasion and confusion from the Government thus far. That is why Ministers must do everything in their power to clarify how they will take forward the protection of the UK's environment in this new political situation. There is so much about the EU that we do not want to abandon. For example, as part of my other brief, I have noticed in meetings on the digital single market a strong view that it makes sense to continue to adhere to EU directives and projects, even though we have voluntarily given up the capacity to shape them.

It is worth considering how the country's approach to the environment has been shaped since it joined the EU. As many hon. Members have said, in the 1980s Britain was known as “the dirty man of Europe” because of widespread pollution of air, land and water. There is a risk that Britain will end up regaining that reputation. Although the UK has sometimes willingly followed the drive for environmental standards, and even at times led the way, it has taken years to get this country to meet some standards that are considered the norm in Europe.

When we consider environmental protection, it is worth remembering that in addition to the inherent worth of our landscape and ecosystems, there are key economic benefits to protecting biodiversity. Our natural environment in Scotland contributes an estimated £21.5 billion to the Scottish economy. Scotland also provides the major part of the UK's contribution to the EU-established Natura 2000 network of protected sites, with more than 15% of our land designated for a wealth of habitats and species.

During the campaign, we heard nothing from the Brexiters about what a vote to leave would mean for the habitats directive, for the circular economy, with its need for long-term planning and investment, or for issues around water quality, on which the UK still has a lot of catching up to do. What we did hear was a deep and often ideologically driven opposition to “red tape”. That red tape includes measures that protect rare species and unique habitats, and that prevent companies from damaging the environment or using dangerous chemicals in their products. It is now time to put the rhetorical bluster about red tape behind us and move on to focusing on what the Government's red lines will be as they undertake these negotiations. If their priorities are muddled, or if key protections are sacrificed for short-term gain, we could be living with the impact for generations. Wherever all the moving parts of this constitutional crisis end up, we must ensure that the UK continues on the right path. As a range of environmental groups

asserted before and after Brexit, co-operation and collaboration within Europe and with the EU works, because we do not solve such problems in isolation. My nation, Scotland, understands that, but does this House and do this Government also understand?

3.19 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): When considering this question, and in respect of investor confidence, my concerns are as follows. Investment in oil and gas renewables, or any energy or environmental project or initiative, relies on, among other things, stable legislation. Investors must be able to rely on the conditions under which they are prepared to invest lasting for, preferably, the duration of that project or initiative. That has not been the case with this Government and previous Governments.

There have been about 18 legislative changes in the oil and gas sector in the past 15 years. Allied to that, there has been the withdrawal from green initiatives such as the zero-carbon home policy. The green deal home improvement fund was abolished. Solar subsidies have been cut and the onshore wind farm subsidy has been removed. The door has been opened to fracking and a cap for biomass fuel subsidy has been introduced. The UK Green Investment Bank has been privatised, the green tax target on renewable energy investment has been abandoned and green car incentives have been cut. Particularly significant for me, as I worked on one of the projects, was the cancelling of the competition for carbon capture and storage.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): My hon. Friend is illustrating the sorry place the Government have now taken the country. It is no longer Britannia rules the waves: it is Britannia waives the rules.

Philip Boswell: That is an excellent point well made by my hon. Friend.

The legislative changes in that short list can do nothing but discourage investors from investing in new energy production. The cancellation of the £1 billion carbon capture and storage competition initiative set out in the 2015 autumn statement will make it almost impossible for the UK to meet its climate change targets.

Calum Kerr: My hon. Friend highlights one reason why there is concern among Opposition Members. I have a degree of faith in the ministerial team who are sitting on the Treasury Bench. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), and the Secretary of State understand the challenges. In this place, however, all too often the Treasury decides. Will my hon. Friend join me in pushing for a member of the ministerial team in the Chamber to become Chancellor?

Philip Boswell: I thank my hon. Friend for his commendable comments. I agree with him wholeheartedly.

Matthew Bell, the chief executive of the Committee on Climate Change, said:

“if you don’t have CCS, then you really need to virtually completely decarbonise your transport sector and completely decarbonise your heating sectors, in order to deliver on the 2050 ambition”.

Since both these sectors seriously lag behind in the decarbonisation of energy production, this seems extremely unlikely, to say the least. The underlying message of the changes is that the cost of subsidising renewable energy has been underestimated by the Government. That has led to the Treasury’s withdrawal of the green deals for consumers, housebuilders and energy investors alike. The Government have instead put all their eggs in the dual basket of fracking and nuclear energy, neither of which looks to be progressing very smoothly, and that makes achieving the UK’s mandatory climate change targets highly unlikely. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), who is no longer in the Chamber, touched on the problems of Hinkley C. As anyone can see, this history of successive short-termist UK Governments continuously moving the legislative goalposts can only undermine investor confidence. Brexit will only serve to exacerbate that problem further, which was a point well made by the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), who is no longer in the Chamber.

On energy security, last year I was a member of the European Energy Market Design Committee. The Committee was at a very early stage of engagement, but the potential for cross-European energy sharing among EU members via interconnectors and the like was striking. I wonder if that Committee will even sit again this year, given Brexit. It should be obvious to all that an efficient interconnector network and shared energy design across Europe would benefit all. When the wind is blowing in Scotland, as it invariably does, the energy that is generated can be used elsewhere. If there is no wind, but the sun is shining in Spain, we can share that mutual benefit. I sincerely hope the Committee does meet again, but we have just made things much harder for ourselves as we try to co-ordinate European efficient energy supply from without the EU.

I should say at this point that Scotland has no intention of suffering the fallout from Brexit, the ramifications of which are still to be understood. As my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen South and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) both pointed out, we are staying in Europe.

I, like most sensible politicians, turn to independent experts for opinions and answers to questions about complex matters such as the natural environment. My points about the circular economy have been well made by other Members, so I will skip on to my next point.

The Institution of Environmental Sciences is currently conducting a survey of its members, in which it asks:

“What impact do you think the UK’s decision to leave the EU will have on environmental protection?”

An overwhelming 81% of highly educated, experienced environmental professionals consider that

“Without binding EU law, it is likely environmental regulations will be weakened or scrapped in the UK.”

A pre-EU referendum survey of members of the Institution of Environmental Sciences showed that 68% were in support of the UK remaining in the EU. The UK has been disproportionately successful in securing funding for research projects in the environmental sciences and other sectors due to the strength of our science base. Under the seventh framework programme, FP7, which ran from 2007 to 2013, €1,704 million was spent on

[Philip Boswell]

projects falling under the environment theme. Of the 4,055 projects funded under the FP7 environment theme, according to the Community Research and Development Information Services, 603 were based in the UK, which made us second only to Germany, with 645.

Kerry McCarthy: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point about the contribution of EU funding to research. I recently visited the Plymouth Marine Laboratory. While I was there, it was announced that it would receive a significant six-figure sum from Europe to fund some of its research, but obviously it is now very worried about what Brexit will mean. I also went to Harper Adams agricultural University, which does amazing work with lasers, drones and all sorts of hi-tech research. Again, that is dependent on EU funding to a large extent.

Philip Boswell: I completely agree with the hon. Lady and share her concerns about funding when Britain leaves the EU. Brexit does not bode well for the future of positive environmental projects in the UK.

I want to ask a number of questions of the Minister and to make a final point. First, Scotland has an incredible opportunity to be a world leader in a range of renewable technologies that are a vital part of our energy supply in the UK. They help the environment and create jobs in communities across Scotland. What steps will the Secretary of State and her Government take to ensure that Scotland remains at the forefront of renewable and offshore industries?

Secondly, the recent vote to leave the EU has plunged the UK's energy sector into further uncertainty. The SNP calls on the UK Government to halt their damaging programme of austerity and to inject the economy with the investment necessary to stimulate growth and create a healthy environment for investors and consumers alike. What will the Government do to protect businesses and consumers from the Brexit fallout?

Thirdly, the SNP believes that enhancing energy efficiency in homes throughout the UK can provide valuable benefits to individual consumers, from improvements to quality of life to reducing fuel poverty, which is a key issue that has not been touched on enough today. The energy efficiency of homes should be a top priority so, in that respect, what does the Secretary of State intend to do to reduce fuel poverty? Fourthly, what do she and her Government intend to do so that we will hit our climate change targets and keep the lights on?

Renewable energy storage and efficiency are key to the future of UK energy. More needs to be done on non-intermittent green energy, so I urge the Secretary of State to invest in pumped storage, particularly at Cruachan and Coire Glas in Scotland.

3.29 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): We have had an important and revealing debate—revealing because it has confirmed our worst fears: that the Government called a referendum without first carrying out an analysis of what might happen should the electorate opt to leave the EU. It can be called nothing but reckless

to enter upon a process without first carrying out a risk assessment. The analysis should have come first, as we have heard from many hon. Members in this debate.

This has been an excellent debate, however, with a deep understanding of all the impacts of leaving the EU. The shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), talked about the impact on climate change and the impact it is already having on some of the poorest people in our communities—2.83 million households are already in fuel poverty and, as we have heard, fuel bills are rising. We also heard an excellent speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), the outstanding Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, highlighting many of the protections at risk if we leave the EU, along with the advances of the past 40 years—40 years of marriage summed up in two years of divorce. In particular, she highlighted the issues of air quality, water management, waste and, of course, biodiversity protection.

We were privileged to hear today the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan). It was a tour de force. She brings to the House the energy with which she served her patients in accident and emergency and her community, and we are honoured to have her in the House. I know that she will be an excellent advocate for her constituents for many years to come. We also heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), who has been a strong campaigner on air quality and emissions, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who said many of the things I wanted to bring up. She brings great expertise to the House. We heard from other hon. Members across the House concerns about the impact of leaving the EU.

It was the Government's determination that we should have a referendum, but first the impact of leaving should have been analysed—clearly, remaining would have resulted in normal policy processes. They could have then shared the outcomes with the electorate. We have heard today about the many risks. Not only should the impact assessment have taken place, but there should have been an understanding of the volume and depth of our regulatory ties with the EU and some scenario planning for what environmental protections the Government would prioritise should the pound plummet, as it is at the moment.

For instance, a member of the public asked me whether pillar 2 of the common agricultural policy would be implemented in full or whether the Government would scale back on the £563 million currently received back from the EU, and whether they would meet their match-funding obligations. We need to know the detail. How will farmers maintain a competitive edge while addressing conservation challenges and ensuring sustainable protections? We have not heard from the Government how much legislation is tied up with the EU. It is estimated that about 70% of our environmental protections originate from Brussels, but what is the real figure and how integrated are we? We have not heard from them how much resource is needed to carry out detailed analysis of the impact of leaving the EU in the context of the cut to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs of 57% by 2020. Neither have we heard what amount of resources would be necessary to renegotiate each regulation, if that is the path we go down. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr Syms) suggested an alternative way forward.

How will we—or will we not—engage with the EU in the future on so many of these important environmental issues? How will we regulate, police and enforce the new UK-based law system as it affects the environment in respect of what currently occurs in the EU courts? What will be the mechanisms of the future? We still do not know. We have not heard about the costs of the necessary work and we have not heard even whether the people with the right skill sets are present in the Department at this time. We have not heard how the fall of the pound, wiping millions off the value of our economy, will impact on environmental projects and research. Neither have we seen any analysis of the global impacts. Perhaps the Government plan is simply to buy the whole package off Europe, but at what price? Will the cost be the same as for existing EU nations or will we pay more for those benefits? These are questions that must be answered.

Many Labour Members are concerned about the global impacts on the environment because we believe that protecting our climate and environment is one of the most important functions of Government. We are already witnessing a massive impact of decades of neglect. We see floods and famine, disease and drought, climate change and conflict, and we see population migration as a result, the impact of which can be felt across the globe, including on us here in the UK. The environment does not respect national borders. From the macro level to the micro level in respect of the loss of habitats and species, the Government have a weighty responsibility to drive forward a programme of responsible stewardship.

In 2010, the UK led the world on issues such as climate change and improving the environment. Opposition Members are proud of that, even while we acknowledge that there was so much more to do. As we have heard today, when it comes to dealing with climate change issues, we have slipped out of the top 10 nations and are now ranked 13th in the world—not the way in which we want to progress on these issues as we move forward. The UK led the EU as a major player on the global stage for environmental protections. We want to ensure that we maintain a strong voice as we move forward, rebalancing our natural environment. The strength of our influence, however, is now unclear. We will no longer be at the EU table, pressing the EU to go further.

Given that we have a falling and failing economy, I must press the Minister to commit to legislate to secure protection on all environmental measures that we are currently obliged to meet in the EU. How will he advance them, and how will he regulate to ensure enforcement of them? As we look back at our history, we do not want to become known as “the dirty man of Europe”; we want to make real advances on where we are today. Labour is clear: the Government must act urgently to replace these vital environmental protections in full.

On the most simple level, I want the Minister to clarify whether we will see—before the summer recess as the Government committed to provide—the two long-awaited 25-year plans for food and farming and the plans for the environment, or are these now placed in the box marked, “We did not have a leave plan, so we do not know what on earth we are going to do”? Will the Minister please provide some clarification today?

Labour wants to ensure that external pressures still lean on this Government. On air quality, we saw the World Health Organisation report released earlier today. Air quality is a public health issue; it impacts on people’s respiratory functions. As someone who worked in respiratory medicine for 20 years, I understand the impact that bad air can have. We have heard today how up to 50,000 people’s lives are ended prematurely as a result of the quality of air in our country. Yes, people are dying prematurely.

We need to know what the Government are going to do about the urgent question of air quality. It is already a serious issue in my own city of York, where people are dying prematurely, and I am aware of plans for developments that will worsen the air quality in our city. There are questions that we must address, from the question of how many trees we will plant to the question of how we will protect the provisions of important directives, to which so many of my colleagues have referred today. We want answers to those questions. The Government must set out their strategy for the future, which they failed to do before the EU referendum to take account of a possible leave vote.

Perhaps the Minister will enlighten us today. Will he commit himself to continuing to apply the precautionary principle when scientific data are not complete, or will he agree with the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and adopt the much weaker United States risk-based approach, which imposes limits on the way in which pesticides, genetically modified crops and food management are dealt with, so that profit is often placed ahead of environmental protections? We have a right to know the answer, as do the people of our country.

If there were time, I would raise many more of our concerns about the Government’s environmental protections. Ours is a fragile and complex environment. Over the last decades, we have worked diligently with our European friends and neighbours to rebalance our environment and climate, and today the Government should have made clear how they will advance the progress that has been made so far. We cannot afford further delay. We believe that the Government must, as a matter of urgency, replicate the multitude of EU directives in UK law. I look forward to hearing from the Minister how he will secure our environment for the years to come.

3.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):

Let me begin by paying a huge tribute to the hon. Member for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) for an extraordinary maiden speech. It contained five elements that, I think, encapsulated the heart of this debate. First, there was her extraordinary sense of history, and the commitment that she showed in talking about Nye Bevan and the Clean Air Act 1956. Secondly, there was her sense of responsibility, and of the scale of the challenge that we face. Thirdly, there were her energy and optimism. Fourthly, there was her sense of place: she said she thought people who said that Tooting was becoming a fantastic place were missing the fact that—as she felt—it had been a fantastic place all her life. Finally, there was her sense of the importance of humans in the history of the landscape, whether she was talking about the lido at Tooting or about her own community and family.

[Rory Stewart]

In general, through her rhetoric, through her language and through her love of this place, the hon. Lady—as the Member of Parliament who has entered the House at the moment when we are leaving the European Union—gave us a real reason to be optimistic about Parliament and the sovereignty of Parliament. The five elements that she contributed represent exactly what we hope to bring to the British environment in the future.

An enormous number of questions have been asked today. The shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), asked the Government to respond to specific queries on—I think—nine separate occasions. I counted 35 questions posed by him, and a further 117 posed by other Members. I have approximately nine minutes in which to answer those questions, and, with the House's permission, I will therefore focus on the natural environment rather than on energy issues, with apologies to the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig)—Callum senior. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Philip Boswell), who initiated an extremely erudite discussion of many energy-related issues, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), who drew attention to a number of ways in which domestic legislation underpinned UK energy policy, and explained that some of the references to the European Union were a little misleading.

I shall not be able to engage as fully as I would like with the forensic speech made by the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), although it was an extraordinary speech which raised an enormous number of very important points. However, I shall try to deal with those points in the round.

In essence, four main types of point were made in this debate and they form the structure of an answer. First, the importance of being deeply optimistic about Britain's future outside the EU was pointed out, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) and the Secretary of State. That is partly, as the Secretary of State said, because of the very real strengths that exist in this country. As Members on both sides pointed out, we derive immense positives from our membership of the EU, and they have been concisely listed. The hon. Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), for Bristol East and for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) laid out the powerful progress made over the past 42 years in air and water quality, and that is driven by EU law and EU financial assistance, and by the structures of the EU that protected our landscape. As the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) pointed out, it is important for our international industry to ensure we have uniform standards so there is not a race to the bottom. We cannot simply think about this island as though we were not exposed to environmental factors from abroad; 85% of our birds are migratory, and between a third and a half of our air blows in from other countries—that is the air pollution coming into our country. Indeed, our terrestrial biodiversity is dependent on ensuring there is not acid rain and sulphur dioxide raining on the peat bogs and grasses on which we depend.

However, as my hon. Friends the Members for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) and for Poole (Mr Syms) pointed out, we in the United Kingdom had a strong

tradition of environmentalism long before we joined the EU. Indeed, the history of environmental protection in the UK stretches back almost 1,000 years to the formation of the royal forests in Scotland and in England and the habitat protection brought in place to nearly 23% of our land mass at that period, and it carries on through the contributions of Walter Scott and Wordsworth to ensuring the protection of our landscapes. Indeed, over the next four years we will be celebrating several anniversaries: the centenary of the Forestry Commission, founded in 1919; the anniversary of our national parks, founded in 1947; and the anniversary of the Clean Air Act, passed in 1956.

There will be opportunities available to us from leaving the EU. The hon. Member for Brent North pointed out that there have been some advantages from EU funding for flooding, but there have of course been significant challenges too. One way in which we would like to address natural responses to flood management is by planting trees. In order to do that, we need to be able to look at flexible and intelligent ways of moving money between what are currently quite rigid budget structures. If we are dealing with farmers planting trees on their land to slow the flow of water, we need to think intelligently about how the payments we give for agriculture, the environment and flooding can work together, rather than against each other. When looking at laws, we need to ensure we remain flexible with regard to the best of modern science, and there are ways in which rigid legal structures brought into place by 27 member states have in the past made it difficult to respond to recent evidence. Members raised the question of inspections and fines as well, and, again, those rigid inspection regimes have, at their worst, sometimes discredited the very environmental regulations we wish to protect. Finally, as my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) pointed out, there are perverse consequences of parts of the CAP for the environmental conditions we value so much.

The principles on which we now need to move forward were laid out very powerfully by this House, and by the hon. Member for Bristol East in her initial intervention, and they seem to me to be sixfold. They are the principles of realism, of humility, of honesty about conflict, of being honest with the public, of confidence and of identity. I shall expand briefly on those principles. First, on realism, we have to acknowledge that leaving the European Union will not mean leaving government behind. People will continue to be frustrated by bureaucracy and they will continue to have to respond to procurement regulations. We will continue to have to operate in an international environment. We will have to make compromises.

On the principle of humility, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane rightly pointed out that not everyone in this country is always interested in the environment. We have to be realistic about our power and about our capacity as a Government to respond. On the principle of honesty about conflict, land remains a deeply conflicted issue. We must not imagine that simply leaving the European Union will overcome the serious conflicts between different land uses in our constituencies. There are conflicts between people's desire to build housing, people's desire to create renewable energy, people's desire to produce productive food and people's desire to protect the species and habitats that we value so much.

The principles of confidence and identity are perhaps the most important of all. The decision in the referendum was made by one of the most well educated, well travelled populations in the most mature democracy on Earth, and we need to ensure that we recognise the legitimacy of that democratic choice. We need to put our full energy and optimism behind it. We need to understand, in responding to this, that the British identity—this extends to England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland—is based fundamentally on our land.

In moving forward, we need to reassure people. As the Secretary of State pointed out, we need to play a full role in all our international conferences. We need to ensure, for example, that we play a responsible and reliable international role in the forthcoming conferences on biodiversity and on the convention on international trade in endangered species—CITES. We could also be far more imaginative.

Geraint Davies: Does the Minister accept that there is still a case for a second referendum on the exit package and the precise terms of our leaving the EU? We have only agreed to leave in principle; people have not yet seen what is in the can.

Rory Stewart: Absolutely not. I disagree strongly with that intervention. However, the hon. Gentleman has shown the optimism we need through his focus on technology, just as the hon. Member for Bristol East did through her focus on the markets in China and India. There is so much potential out there in the environment. We could show the lead in the Amazon rainforest. We could show the lead in defining, through our natural capital approach, what it means to take a British initiative—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The Minister is saying some important things, but people are chatting.

Rory Stewart: In conclusion, land and the conflicts around land have been fundamental to the problems in our society since the days of Cain and Abel, but we can be confident in this country. We have extraordinary natural scientists. We have a rich civil society with 9 million people connected to environmental non-governmental organisations. We have extraordinary legal structures in place. We have incredible new Members of Parliament, such as the hon. Member for Tooting, bringing their energy and optimism to this House. If we can bring all that together, we can prove in the future, as we have proved over the last millennium, that the British landscape and environment, and their extraordinary combination of productive food and nature, can remain at the heart of our national identity for ever.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 229, Noes 278.

Division No. 42]

[3.54 pm

AYES

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Abbott, Ms Diane | Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena |
| Abrahams, Debbie | Arkless, Richard |
| Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina | Austin, Ian |
| Alexander, Heidi | Bailey, Mr Adrian |
| Ali, Rushanara | Bardell, Hannah |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Barron, rh Kevin |

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Benn, rh Hilary | Goldsmith, Zac |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Goodman, Helen |
| Black, Mhairi | Grant, Peter |
| Blackford, Ian | Gray, Neil |
| Blackman, Kirsty | Green, Kate |
| Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta | Greenwood, Lilian |
| Blomfield, Paul | Greenwood, Margaret |
| Boswell, Philip | Griffith, Nia |
| Brake, rh Tom | Gwynne, Andrew |
| Brennan, Kevin | Haigh, Louise |
| Brock, Deidre | Hamilton, Fabian |
| Brown, Alan | Hanson, rh Mr David |
| Brown, rh Mr Nicholas | Harris, Carolyn |
| Buck, Ms Karen | Hayes, Helen |
| Burden, Richard | Healey, rh John |
| Burgon, Richard | Hendry, Drew |
| Butler, Dawn | Hollern, Kate |
| Byrne, rh Liam | Hopkins, Kelvin |
| Cadbury, Ruth | Hosie, Stewart |
| Cameron, Dr Lisa | Howarth, rh Mr George |
| Campbell, rh Mr Alan | Hunt, Tristram |
| Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair | Huq, Dr Rupa |
| Champion, Sarah | Hussain, Imran |
| Chapman, Jenny | Johnson, rh Alan |
| Cherry, Joanna | Johnson, Diana |
| Clegg, rh Mr Nick | Jones, Gerald |
| Clwyd, rh Ann | Jones, Helen |
| Coaker, Vernon | Jones, Mr Kevan |
| Cooper, Julie | Jones, Susan Elan |
| Cooper, Rosie | Kane, Mike |
| Cooper, rh Yvette | Keeley, Barbara |
| Cowan, Ronnie | Kerevan, George |
| Coyle, Neil | Kerr, Calum |
| Creagh, Mary | Kyle, Peter |
| Creasy, Stella | Lammy, rh Mr David |
| Cruddas, Jon | Law, Chris |
| Cunningham, Alex | Leslie, Chris |
| Cunningham, Mr Jim | Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma |
| Dakin, Nic | Lewis, Clive |
| Danczuk, Simon | Lucas, Caroline |
| Davies, Geraint | Mactaggart, rh Fiona |
| Day, Martyn | Madders, Justin |
| De Piero, Gloria | Malhotra, Seema |
| Docherty-Hughes, Martin | Mann, John |
| Donaldson, Stuart Blair | Marris, Rob |
| Doughty, Stephen | Marsden, Mr Gordon |
| Dowd, Jim | Maskell, Rachael |
| Dowd, Peter | Mc Nally, John |
| Durkan, Mark | McCabe, Steve |
| Edwards, Jonathan | McCaig, Callum |
| Efford, Clive | McCarthy, Kerry |
| Elliott, Julie | McDonagh, Siobhain |
| Ellman, Mrs Louise | McDonald, Andy |
| Elmore, Chris | McDonald, Stewart Malcolm |
| Esterson, Bill | McDonald, Stuart C. |
| Evans, Chris | McDonnell, John |
| Farron, Tim | McFadden, rh Mr Pat |
| Fellows, Marion | McGarry, Natalie |
| Ferrier, Margaret | McGovern, Alison |
| Fitzpatrick, Jim | McInnes, Liz |
| Flello, Robert | McKinnell, Catherine |
| Fletcher, Colleen | McLaughlin, Anne |
| Flint, rh Caroline | Meale, Sir Alan |
| Flynn, Paul | Mearns, Ian |
| Fovargue, Yvonne | Monaghan, Dr Paul |
| Furniss, Gill | Morden, Jessica |
| Gardiner, Barry | Morris, Grahame M. |
| Gethins, Stephen | Mulholland, Greg |
| Gibson, Patricia | Mullin, Roger |
| Glass, Pat | Murray, Ian |
| Glendon, Mary | Newlands, Gavin |
| Godsiff, Mr Roger | O'Hara, Brendan |

Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat

Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Twigg, Stephen
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jeff Smith and
 Holly Lynch**

NOES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert

Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Carswell, Mr Douglas
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David

Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver
 Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John

Howlett, Ben
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric

| | |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| Pincher, Christopher | Swayne, rh Sir Desmond |
| Pow, Rebecca | Swire, rh Mr Hugo |
| Prentis, Victoria | Syms, Mr Robert |
| Pursglove, Tom | Thomas, Derek |
| Quin, Jeremy | Throup, Maggie |
| Quince, Will | Tolhurst, Kelly |
| Raab, Mr Dominic | Tomlinson, Justin |
| Redwood, rh John | Tomlinson, Michael |
| Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob | Tracey, Craig |
| Robinson, Mary | Tredinnick, David |
| Rosindell, Andrew | Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie |
| Rudd, rh Amber | Truss, rh Elizabeth |
| Rutley, David | Tugendhat, Tom |
| Sandbach, Antoinette | Turner, Mr Andrew |
| Selous, Andrew | Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew |
| Shapps, rh Grant | Vaizey, Mr Edward |
| Sharma, Alok | Vara, Mr Shailesh |
| Shelbrooke, Alec | Vickers, Martin |
| Simpson, rh Mr Keith | Walker, Mr Charles |
| Skidmore, Chris | Walker, Mr Robin |
| Smith, Chloe | Warburton, David |
| Smith, Henry | Warman, Matt |
| Smith, Julian | Wharton, James |
| Smith, Royston | Wheeler, Heather |
| Soames, rh Sir Nicholas | White, Chris |
| Solloway, Amanda | Whittaker, Craig |
| Soubry, rh Anna | Whittingdale, rh Mr John |
| Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline | Wiggin, Bill |
| Spencer, Mark | Williams, Craig |
| Stephenson, Andrew | Williamson, rh Gavin |
| Stevenson, John | Wilson, Mr Rob |
| Stewart, Bob | Wollaston, Dr Sarah |
| Stewart, Iain | Wragg, William |
| Stewart, Rory | Wright, rh Jeremy |
| Streeter, Mr Gary | Zahawi, Nadhim |
| Stride, Mel | |
| Stuart, Graham | Tellers for the Noes: |
| Sturdy, Julian | Simon Kirby and |
| Sunak, Rishi | Sarah Newton |

Question accordingly negated.

SATs Results

4.7 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that every child deserves an excellent education which enables them to grow and thrive; notes that the Government has published figures showing that a lower proportion of children were meeting the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2 overall in 2016 than in 2015; further notes that, as a result, in 2016 47 percent of children will be told that they have not reached the expected standard in at least one of their SATs papers; regrets that the Secretary of State for Education has pushed ahead with chaotic and confusing reforms which mean that thousands of children will be unnecessarily labelled as failures, and that the Secretary of State is steadily losing the confidence of teachers; and calls on the Government urgently to review primary assessment and the 2016 SATs results and to clarify that these will not be used for measuring and judging school performance.

The 2016 key stage 2 standard assessment tests, which assess children in reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation and maths, are the first to assess the new primary national curriculum, which was introduced in 2014. The Government claim that they have raised expectations for pupils at the end of key stage 2, but those at the chalk-face—primary school teachers and school leaders—say that the expected standard for SATs has been set at a level that is beyond the reach of the majority of children.

Our children are being set up to fail. Almost half of England's 11-year-olds will now go on to secondary school, having been told by this Government that they are failures. However, the real failures are this Government, particularly the current Secretary of State for Education who pushed ahead with this flawed system despite all the warnings from the education profession that the primary assessment system was not fit for purpose.

Under this Government, children who fail to meet the totally unrealistic expected target at the end of key stage 2—47% of children—will be required to resit these tests in future. School leaders were told yesterday that the catch-up funding for secondary schools will not increase despite the rise in the number of pupils deemed to be below the expected standard. For these pupils, the first year at big school—and all the excitement and anticipation that it should bring—will instead become an anxious replay of drilling for tests in English and maths, which they sat in primary school. I can only imagine the impact on those young lives—to have to go through it all again, to feel a failure, to see their friends getting on when they should be looking ahead to new challenges and new opportunities.

I remember being told that I would never amount to anything, but look at me now. I want—teachers want—every child to know that they are amazing. I want an education system that helps every child realise their full potential.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The hon. Lady may remember that under the last Labour Government we had such a system. It was fantastic. Every child was told that they were succeeding. It was just that when we looked at the international league tables, we went down, down and down. We had grade inflation. Whatever her critique of SATs results this year, does she not agree that we must have high standards and we must maintain those standards over time; otherwise

[Graham Stuart]

we will go back to those days under Labour when we let down the future of young people by pretending that they were successful when, in fact, they were not?

Angela Rayner: I remember that under Labour we had Sure Start, we had Every Child Matters, we had new schools, we had teachers in the profession, we had people and children feeling that they were happy. At present we have teachers taking unprecedented industrial action and leaving the profession at record rates, so I take no lectures from those on the Government Benches regarding the current situation.

The Opposition recognise that ongoing assessment and consistent testing in schools is extremely important to help teachers and parents support and provide new challenges for all children. Such tests can identify and close any gaps in knowledge so that all pupils can do well. But a proper assessment regime needs consistency and needs to be understood by all.

The Government have utterly failed to deliver on this. The current SATs tests go too far. The Secretary of State has chopped and changed too much. She has caused disruption and chaos in our schools and extra bureaucracy for our teachers. The key stage 2 assessments have been an unmitigated disaster and a nightmare for thousands of children, ending in disappointment and prolonged uncertainty. They also have serious consequences for thousands of schools because of the way this Government use them as part of the school accountability system.

KS2 SATs are used to rank schools in league tables. They are scrutinised by the Department for Education and regional schools commissioners, who form judgments on schools' performance. Ofsted uses SATs results when forming its inspection judgments, and parents take them into account when choosing their children's school. Schools' reputations are heavily dependent on how their pupils perform in these tests.

The National Association of Head Teachers asked the Secretary of State not to publish the data, as she herself has conceded that it is not to be compared with that for previous years. The NAHT general secretary, Russell Hobby, said:

"Given the changes to SATs this year, and the mistakes we've seen, it is hard see how valuable this data will be to parents who want to understand how well a school is performing year on year or compared to other schools. But the government does love a league table, regardless of how accurate it may be."

Worryingly, the schools commissioners are already using the provisional results from these tests to identify those schools to which they can apply their extensive legal powers to force them into academy status on the spurious grounds that they are failing, coasting or underperforming.

Does all this remind us of anything—children who are judged failures at an early age, being separated from their primary school classmates; schools which are being wrongly condemned as second class? That sounds to me like the dark days of the 11-plus, with children branded failures before they have even reached their teens and separated from their classmates, with all the stigma that that can bring. Many adults today still recount the lasting effects that that had on them.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I have to confess that I myself am one such failure—of the 12-plus system. However, does the hon. Lady agree with any form of testing? If so, what type of testing would she bring forward?

Angela Rayner: I made it quite clear in my opening remarks that the Opposition recognise the need for testing, but it is the chaotic way in which the Secretary of State has brought in the new key stage 2 SATs that is damaging and that potentially makes people feel a failure. Given what the hon. Gentleman has just said, I am sure he recognises that the 11-plus and 12-plus caused uncertainty and that feeling of failure. I remember how I felt when I was branded a failure, and these things do not help our young people today.

The Government seem hellbent on bringing back the 11-plus through the back door. They can deny that, but the evidence is right in front of us: children are being selected on the basis of muddle-headed tests into two separate groups—winners and losers, successes and failures—and their primary schools are being branded in exactly the same way. It is the 11-plus by any other name.

The tests do not give a rounded picture of the work of individual pupils or their schools. I could not put things any better than Mrs Jane Grecic, the headteacher of Lansbury Bridge School in St Helen's, who wrote to one of her 11-year-old pupils, Ben, about his SATs results. Ben is autistic, and Mrs Grecic congratulated him on his fabulous progress, writing:

"these tests only measure a little bit of you and your abilities... Ben... is made up of many other skills and talents that we at Lansbury Bridge see and measure in other ways... These tests do not measure... Your artistic talents... Your ability to work in a team... Your growing independence... Your kindness... Your ability to express your opinion... Your abilities in sport... Your ability to make and keep friends... Your ability to discuss and evaluate your own progress... Your design and building talents... Your musical ability".

This fine headteacher concludes:

"we are so pleased that all of these different talents and abilities make you the special person you are and these are all of the things we measure to reassure us that you are always making progress and continuing to develop as a lovely bright young man. Well done Ben, we are very proud of you."

I am sure the whole House will join me in congratulating young Ben on his development at the tender age of 11 and, indeed, his headteacher, on showing in very real, human terms how these test results should in no way make a child feel they are not developing well.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): My hon. Friend makes a persuasive case. Does she agree that we should be encouraging children and giving them confidence, particularly in areas such as mine, where there are high levels of deprivation, and where children are told by many people that they cannot achieve or go far in life? These things add to that, and we should be encouraging our children and giving them confidence, not discouraging them.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why we have to heed the concerns of the professionals. It is a real tragedy when we set children up to fail. The Government need to work with the profession to make sure this year's mistakes are not repeated and to build a system that works better for

children, parents and schools. These results do not reflect the dedication of teachers and the many extra hours they have worked to ensure that all children can fulfil their potential, despite the turmoil caused by the Secretary of State's chaotic and confusing reforms.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Is the shadow Secretary of State aware of the real danger of children leaving primary school and heading to secondary school without adequate maths and English? Once they have done that, there is only a one in nine chance they will cover the ground necessary for them to develop into proper adults. Is that not a serious matter, and should it not at least be addressed through some form of knowledge about outcomes?

Angela Rayner: I am only too aware of that, because I failed my GCSEs—I did not get grades A to C. We had a well-attended Westminster Hall debate about early years intervention and it is important that we put the structures in place to help children, not make them feel like failures through our own failures.

These SATs undermine the morale of our dedicated primary teachers, who have battled against the odds to prepare children for tests they knew were inappropriate while trying to protect them from their worst consequences. They could result in thousands more schools being forced to become academies. They do not reflect the hard work of children with special educational needs or those for whom English is an additional language. These tests are designed to measure what children cannot do, not what they can do. Nor do they measure the many ways in which our children learn to develop and succeed every day of their young lives.

The impact of these SATs on children is best illustrated by their parents. Rachel McCollin from Birmingham says:

“My son is tired, stressed and paranoid that he's going to fail—I can't wait for this week to be over.”

Katharine Lee from Bath says:

“My son hardly slept on Sunday night and was a nervous wreck on Monday morning, despite us telling him that these tests are not the be-all and end-all. It's way too much pressure at 11.”

We have already forced the Government into a U-turn on forced academisation, but they are using these results to compel even more academisation through the back door. It is hardly surprising that teachers and school leaders have lost confidence in the Secretary of State and her education policies. Guidance arrived late and changed frequently. Test papers were leaked and the design of tests was poor. Preparation for the SATs had a negative impact on children's access to a broad and balanced curriculum. Ninety per cent. of teachers thought that this year's changes had had a negative impact on children's experience at school. Teachers spoke of demoralisation, demotivation, and physical and mental distress. This is a damning indictment of the Secretary of State's performance. She has been entrusted with the future of our children and the future of our country, and she has failed; we do not need any test to see that.

4.22 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan): I wanted to give the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) the benefit of the doubt, because she has not been shadow Secretary of State for Education for very long and I can sense her passion for the subject,

in terms of her own experiences in education and her family. However, her speech captured everything that is wrong with the Labour party at the moment: mad conspiracy theories, deferring to the unions, and zero answers to the problems facing this country. This is about young people who were let down by a Labour Government who consistently sold them short in terms of their life chances.

The hon. Lady was wrong on all counts—wrong on tests, wrong on selection, and wrong on giving young people the best start in life. Nothing—nothing at all—is more important than making sure that young people master the basics of the three R's, and master them early. If they do not, they face a struggle for the rest of their lives and are denied the opportunity to realise their full potential. That is why making sure that every child in this country has a good grasp of literacy and numeracy is a matter of social justice.

Graham Stuart: Does my right hon. Friend agree that what is particularly sad is that Labour Members appear to think it is more important to let children think that they are ready for secondary school than actually to ensure that they are?

Nicky Morgan: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend, a former Chair of the Education Committee. He is absolutely right that Labour Members appear to want to sell young people short, rather than being clear with them about the standards that are needed to compete not just with the best in this country, but with the best in the world.

When this Government came to office in 2010, too many young people entering secondary school were not able to read, write or add up well enough. England's pupils were far behind their peers in top-performing countries right across the globe. International test after international test showed other nations surging ahead while England's performance stagnated. In fact, the OECD identified England as one of the few countries in which the basic skills of school leavers were no better than those of their grandparents' generation. To me, that is nothing short of a scandal, and central to that scandal was that the curriculum being taught in many primary schools, and the tests that the pupils were taking, were not up to scratch.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My constituency has some spectacular primary schools and some outstanding secondary schools, but as I go around the schools in my constituency, I find that too many young people are let down at the secondary stage of their education. They come out of primary school with very good results, but slip back over their five years in secondary school. What is the Education Secretary going to do about standards in secondary education as well as in primary?

Nicky Morgan: I will not give the hon. Gentleman all the details that I could set out if we were having a broader debate about education, because that would risk straying off the subject of key stage 2 SATs. We are, however, reforming GCSEs, introducing the EBacc, looking at technical and professional education and increasing the number of young people over the age of 16 in apprenticeships. Last Friday we launched the

[Nicky Morgan]

skills plan. I do not disagree that there are challenges at both stages of education. The chief inspector of Ofsted has identified those first three years at secondary school as a time when children, particularly bright children from disadvantaged backgrounds, slip backwards. To me, that is also a matter of social justice, and I think that the hon. Gentleman and I can find common cause on the need to tackle it.

The trouble with the attitude of the Labour party is that while it allowed Labour politicians to trumpet ever higher pass rates, the price was low standards that let down the young people trying to master these vital subjects.

Neil Carmichael: To reinforce the Secretary of State's point, is she concerned by the observation of National Numeracy that 78% of this country's adult population scarcely reach level 2 in maths? That is appalling and we must work with total devotion to put the situation right. The SATs under discussion are one tool in a toolbox that we must use.

Nicky Morgan: I agree entirely with the Chairman of the Education Committee. Numeracy and literacy are basic skills and building blocks—the Prime Minister has called them the ultimate vocational subjects. Everybody needs to have confidence in them. On post-16 funding, this Government have required those who do not have a grade C at GCSE English and maths to continue to take the subject. It is worth noting that 70% of key stage 2 pupils who took the new test last week achieved the expected standard in mathematics. They are to be congratulated on their hard work.

This Government refused to accept the status quo that let young people down. That was why, in consultation with experts from across the education sector, we introduced a new, world-class primary school curriculum. That curriculum raised the bar on what counts as a good enough standard in the three R's so that children would leave primary school genuinely ready for success in their secondary studies.

To measure how schools and pupils were performing against the new curriculum, new tests were required. I know that some oppose testing, but they could not be more wrong. The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne was challenged by my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) about what tests she would introduce, but she could not answer that question. I think we can agree that tests are a vital part of teaching because they allow teachers to know whether a pupil has understood key subjects, give parents confidence that their children are on track and allow schools to identify where extra support is needed.

These tests are not about holding children to account and they are not exams. The best schools try to make sure that taking SATs involves as little stress as possible. As one teacher said to me just last week, "The children had such a positive attitude towards the SATs, which definitely paid off."

William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): My right hon. Friend knows about teachers' concerns on this issue. What is she doing to assuage these concerns and to engage with the profession? More importantly, what is

she doing to ensure that, next year, more than 53% of children in our primary schools meet the expected standards?

Nicky Morgan: I am of course aware of the concerns. I read emails and letters from teachers, and I have conversations with teachers at every school that I visit. Those concerns were inevitable, given that this was the first year. This was always going to be a challenging year, as is the case for the first year of any new tests. I say that as someone who took the new GCSEs in their first year, way back in the late 1980s. We have made moves to tackle the workload and we are, of course, listening to the feedback that teachers have given us this year as we think about the structure of the assessment frameworks for next year. We will continue to do that.

I talked about a positive attitude towards SATs because that is not unique. Polling from ComRes of 10 and 11-year-olds found that 62% of pupils either "don't mind" or "enjoy" taking the tests. That is far more than the number who say that they "don't like" or "hate" taking the tests.

As I said, I know that in the first year of these tests being rolled out, the administration was not as smooth as it could have been, and for that we have apologised. However, in the few cases where errors occurred, we took immediate action, ensuring that the overall roll-out of the new SATs was a success. Lower results do not represent a failure of our reforms. I have been very clear that it is not possible to compare this year's results with last year's. We have always been clear that because we not only introduced a new curriculum but raised the bar, results would be lower as the new curriculum is bedding in.

That brings into sharp relief the contrast between this Government and the Labour party. We want children to really understand the curriculum so that they can compete with the best in the world. We do not want to run the risk of them leaving school without the knowledge and skills that they need to succeed. The Labour party, in contrast, clearly appears quite happy for that to happen. Labour Members forget that it is not the children in schools in leafy areas with supportive parents who read to them every night who most need their primary curriculum to set them up for life. It is the ones who are not brought up with high aspirations and interested parents who need their teachers and schools to aim high for them, and that is what these tests and the new curriculum are about.

In fact, the results showed that schools have resoundingly risen to meet the higher bar: two thirds of pupils achieved the expected standard in reading; seven in 10 achieved it in mathematics; and almost three quarters achieved it in writing. Despite the doom-mongering from Labour Members, more than half of young people achieved the expected standard in all three subjects. That number will rise as schools and pupils experience more of the new curriculum.

What does this mean for children who did not meet the expected standard? It means one thing: secondary schools are now aware of that and are able to give those pupils the support that they need to catch up. It absolutely does not mean, and never has meant, that those children have somehow failed. The only people who have used these results to label children failures are the National Union of Teachers and now the Labour party. That is absolutely shameful.

Andrew Gwynne: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nicky Morgan: No, I am not going to give way.

Let me also be clear about what this means for schools. Conservative Members believe that schools have to be held to account for the results that their pupils achieve. However, they need to be held to account fairly, which is why we are judging schools not just on the standards that they achieve, but on the progress that they make with every child, so that schools with challenging intakes get proper recognition for the achievement they are making by pushing their pupils to success. On top of that, in recognition of the fact that this is a transitional year, I have also announced that the proportion of schools judged to be below the floor when the new progress bar is set will be no more than one percentage point higher than last year. That progress bar will be released in September, and no school can be identified as being below the floor before then.

Having listened to the speech by the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, I was struck by just how easily it could have been written by the NUT's acting general secretary. It represented the final stage of the Labour party's transformation into the parliamentary wing of the NUT.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nicky Morgan: No, not at the moment.

It was noticeable last week—this is noticeable today—that there was a greater presence on the Labour Benches for an urgent question about the NUT strike than there was for the previous day's Education questions.

Vernon Coaker: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nicky Morgan: No, I am not going to give way at the moment.

In our March White Paper, we set out plans to tackle areas of entrenched educational underperformance. What we did not expect was that one of those areas of entrenched underperformance would be the NUT itself. Its readiness to use the word "failure" about children, and to oppose every reform that is designed to recognise and reward great teaching and to enable schools to tackle the not so good, is yet a further example of the chronic underperformance by that union on behalf of its members. More importantly, it is a failure for the children with whom its members work.

We now see the same attitude from the Opposition. In my two years as Secretary of State for Education, I have seen the transformation of the Labour party's attitude to our education reforms from the secret support of the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) to the hedged bets of the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell). We now have the outright hostility of the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne to the raising of standards. I hope that the hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) will forgive me for lacking the time to work out where she stood.

The Labour party has firmly chosen, as the motion indicates, to become the anti-standards party, devoid of ideas and determined to protect vested interests and union barons rather than putting children and parents

first. It has gone from the party of education, education, education, to the party of low standards, low aspiration and low expectations.

I do not want to end this speech by focusing on the collapsing Labour party; I want to end it by saying thank you. Rather than doing down the achievements of schools, teachers and pupils, I want to celebrate them and commend their exceptional work.

Vernon Coaker: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The Secretary of State is not giving way, is she? No.

Nicky Morgan: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I say thank you to the teachers, who once again have risen to meet the challenge and to deliver for young people. I reiterate today that teaching is the most noble of professions. Last week's achievements in helping young people to demonstrate their mastery of the basics is yet another example of why that is so. I urge the House to reject the motion.

4.36 pm

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Sometimes in debates such as this, criticising the Government can be quite difficult. When the Secretary of State describes the debacle of SATs as a great success, however, criticising Government policy becomes relatively easy. It is like shooting fish in a barrel.

I start by referring to a headteacher in my constituency—headteacher of the largest primary school in the north-west; it is a standard, middle-class school—who put his pupils through SATs recently. He was so shocked by the outcome that he felt it necessary to write home to the pupils in the following terms. He told the children to look on the bright side, and he wrote:

"The only thing people will remember about the tests from 2016 was that they were one big mess! Your result will not stop you achieving really well at high school and going on to be a fabulous success in the future. Put whatever you got to the back of your mind and move on!"

He told the children:

"Fairness is always vitally important in whatever we do in life. Unfortunately, these tests were really not fair."

This is a very experienced headteacher of a large primary school, in a standard, middle-class area, which has a record of success behind it. He said to the pupils:

"They were much harder than usual and this meant that you didn't get the chance to show how much you have learned. There has been lots in the news about this in the past week and schools all over the country are feeling the same...I think we all feel a bit let down."

He continued:

"You feel let down because you worked so hard and maybe you didn't quite get what you deserved. Your teachers feel the same because they have tried everything in their power to help you achieve and they are frustrated because it hasn't quite turned out as they would have wanted."

He went on to say what a great experience it had been to have the children at the school and that, compared with everything they had enjoyed at school,

"a few test scores mean very little, particularly when the test was unfair anyway."

Graham Stuart: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is as disappointed as I am that when we had inflation in standards—when we had the perception of success, but not the reality—headteachers such as the one he speaks about did not write letters home to parents. It would be good if, in response to that selling out, they had showed outrage similar to that which they showed at the early implementation of a new, higher standard.

John Pugh: I am sure that this headteacher would have done whatever was professionally necessary at the time. I am not sure that he was a headteacher at that time, so I cannot really comment for him. He concluded his letter to his pupils:

“We don’t need tests to tell us how great you all are.”

The worst thing about the letter is that it shows that there was a clear need to remove the feeling among those good, hard-working children that they had failed. I do not think that anyone here is against the summative assessment of primary school children’s progress. I do not think that any Labour Member said that. Nobody is against meaningful feedback or having a tool to establish a baseline for improvement. No one wants to go back to the days of total freedom where there were no reasonable expectations, but we must all—including the Government—be prepared to learn something. We must learn from places such as Finland, which has few tests like our SATs but which, as everybody knows, does very well. We must learn from experts and from teachers who have to implement what we impose. We need a sense—this is clearly lacking from the Secretary of State’s comments—of common enterprise between the teaching profession and the Government. I know that the NUT is the teaching profession, but the Secretary of State needs to incorporate some measure of support for what teachers have been trying to say to her.

We need a bit of humility, which perhaps I can illustrate by using the vexed issue of grammar—I took a look at the grammar sections of this year’s tests. I think that grammar has its place. It provides a recursive definition of a living language and, like a language, it evolves. I happen to think that grammar helps more in understanding foreign languages than our own, and I argue that the greatest orators in this place are not necessarily the greatest grammarians. If someone was stopped mid-sentence and asked what type of clause they were using, they might be in some difficulty. Most people have been speaking grammatically for most of their life with a fair amount of success—it is rather like Molière’s character Monsieur Jourdain, who found, with some surprise, that he had been talking prose all his life.

There may be value in trying to understand the rules that one unconsciously follows, and there is genuinely value and fun in a bit of clause analysis—I certainly enjoyed it when I was at school. However, it is arguable how far that benefits the users of language, and how much meta vocabulary one needs to acquire, particularly as there seems to be no particular consistency as to what vocabulary one ought to have, and there seems to be some opacity in what terminology one needs to pick up. Fronted adverbials certainly were not there in my day. I did Latin, preferring the imperfect to the past progressive. All these things are fairly arcane, esoteric stuff, and it is arguable how far you can go down that road without descending into the kind of

pedantry that dismisses split infinitives or ending sentences with prepositions. But it is simply unarguable that imposing, in haste, a curriculum and test of limited value, with scant preparation, and discouraging well-intentioned pupils and teachers in the process, is rash. It is rash, and it requires some serious explanation and apology.

4.42 pm

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate and to talk about SATs this year. I remember that when I chaired the Education Committee a number of years ago, we had the SATs fiasco under the previous Government. That was when a true mess was made of SATs. This year a new assessment has been brought in, and I can share with the House, having chaired the Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) is in that Chair now—that whenever new assessments are brought in, there is some level of volatility. We will not get everything right, and I would not try to claim that we necessarily have this year, but at first there is volatility and then, over time, outcomes improve.

The central question is, how are we going to raise standards? Well, actually, the first question is: are we doing a good enough job? That would have been a good question for the shadow Secretary of State to ask. Were we doing a good enough job in 2010? Are we today? Things are always partial, and it is always hard to get data that are entirely comparative, but the answer is that, in the context of what is happening around the world, it would appear that too many of the children in England are not given the requisite skills, capability and knowledge to flourish in secondary school, with lifelong negative impacts on them and their families.

That would appear to be the evidence, but we did not hear that from the shadow Secretary of State. Instead—I do not mean to be too harsh on one of her first outings—we had a rather incoherent if passionate denunciation of testing, because if we feed back the results of tests to people, some will be told that they are not at the required standard and others will be told that they are. The hon. Lady’s speech seemed to be an attack on that in principle, yet that passionate denunciation was married with a public statement that she and her party believe we should still have tests. I do not see how those two things can be put together. It seems an extraordinary conjunction. The shadow Secretary of State needs to think clearly: that is what education policy requires. It is not just a political fight in this House; what happens in schools has real-world effects on children. That was disappointing and it would be really good to hear what the Labour party thinks about tests.

The shadow Secretary of State’s strong, lurid language around failure and failing is unwelcome. We aspire to a high standard. Not everyone is going to reach it, but that is the nature of high standards. It does not mean that everybody else is worthless and it does not mean their learning is worthless. It does not mean that they have not done a good job or worked hard. None the less, do we not have to give people objective ideas about where they would ideally like to be, or do we throw that away because it might demoralise some? She appeared to contradict herself on two sides of the argument.

Neil Carmichael: It is a great pleasure to have an opportunity to comment on my predecessor's observations. Does my hon. Friend agree that the tests are part of a wider mission to improve standards? They are linked to differences in the curriculum and to the attitude we have, which is to give young people aspiration and the tools to deliver on that aspiration. Does he agree that that is part of our complete determination to give young people more opportunity in life?

Graham Stuart: I agree with my hon. Friend. Although I defer to the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), who made such a fine speech, I would have to say that I did not agree with him about his use of the split infinitive and would prefer it was not used in this House, orally or otherwise; but that is because I am a bit of a pedant in that respect. There is a genuine argument to be had.

The hon. Member for Southport rightly started to unpick some of that grammar. How practically useful is it? What exactly is it designed for? Is it excessive in its extent and application, compared with what is sought from it? Those are legitimate questions and perhaps we do need to row back. I do not know. I have not studied it and I would like to hear more. Focusing on those practicalities might be a much more useful dialogue. Instead, the shadow Secretary of State moved on from her two contradictory positions to a rather crazed assessment that this was like the 11-plus. The whole point of the 11-plus was to divide children and select them. I do not think that anyone can suggest that that is what has happened with the SATs this year.

Vernon Coaker: To stop this becoming a sterile debate, let me say from the outset that I do not think there is anybody in this House who is in favour of not trying to improve standards in schools. I think there is also a consensus that testing is part of improving standards in schools. I was disappointed that the Secretary of State's speech did not address the very real problems with the SATs tests this year. The hon. Gentleman has made that point, but we did not hear from the Secretary of State what she intends to do about those problems to put them right for next year.

Graham Stuart: As I said a few minutes ago, all new assessments and tests go through, and create, additional volatility. Members will remember the changes to the English GCSE. They were called a fiasco; I would call them a furore. The unions said they were a disaster and a disgrace, and the schools said it was nothing to do with them, but when they went to court they lost on every single count. It was a new test and it took time. The following year, with pretty much the same test, the schools that had done badly had learned how to do it better. They read the spec in a way that they had obviously failed to do previously, and other technical changes were made.

This is a new assessment. It is not a disaster. We need to unpick its components and look at them carefully to find out whether there is the right balance between raising standards, having high standards and not creating something that is negative in the way it is perceived by children and schools.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): This year, of course, it will be very difficult to embed the new assessment. Does my hon. Friend agree that the

new curriculum assessment gives children a mastery of the subject before they move on? That is far preferable to them moving through the system without having that grasp of the subject.

Graham Stuart: I agree with my hon. Friend. If the answer to my first question—about whether we are doing a good enough job—is no, it is not because we have lazy teachers. Fundamentally, if we are not doing a good enough job or as good a job as our neighbours and competitors, we need to raise standards, and when that happens, there is going to be a shock to the system. That is partly because of the volatility and adjustment and partly because the system needs that shock. It needs to be told.

I sometimes clashed with the hon. Lady's predecessor on the question of what simply raising the bar did to raise standards. It is a mixed answer, but I have seen standards in the system raised partly because the bar was raised and there was clarity about what was required. Whatever the difficulties—there are all sorts of issues and complexities, including academisation—and notwithstanding some of the downsides, we have fundamentally better schools now than we did six years ago, and that is partly because we have stated clearly what we want and asked schools to meet the challenge. I have absolute confidence that next year, as schools learn to adjust to the challenge and headteachers work out how better to use their people and their funds, including the pupil premium, more than 53% of children will meet the standards.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Going through change is difficult. Do the Government have a role to play in keeping our teachers with us, which is what I worry about most of all? Change is hard for the children and teachers, but our teachers are under unprecedented stress, and I worry for them. Do the Government not need to keep a close eye on that and listen to teachers at all times?

Graham Stuart: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The whole House has a role to play and ought not simply to trumpet the negatives, as the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) did, in this early outing as an Opposition spokesperson. It might have been more devastating to be understated than to suggest that this was a return to the 11-plus, which it clearly is not. But there are issues about maintaining engagement with teachers.

People might think that the Secretary of State's fairly vicious assault on the NUT was over the top, but, given my experience of the NUT, I do not think it was. The NUT opposes almost everything. It is tragic. All I can say by way of uplift is this: when I go to primary schools, yes, I meet teachers concerned about the changes in the curriculum and the assessment and about the speed, from their end of the telescope, so to speak, at which they feel the change is happening—they genuinely find it difficult and challenging—but I find them to be a lot more positive than their national representatives on the NUT. It is unfortunate that the NUT is so often seen as speaking for all our teachers. I do not think it does.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) is right that we need to keep teachers on board. We must recognise that the teacher is the most important person in the system. Teacher quality is the

[Graham Stuart]

key. The one thing I learned in five years chairing the Education Committee was that teacher quality was the most important thing. Leaders are important only insofar as they help to bring out the best in teachers. Teacher quality is transformational.

John Pugh: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Graham Stuart: I promised I would not be that long, but I have obviously broken my word—not for the first time.

John Pugh: What does the hon. Gentleman make of the example of Finland, which is very light on tests but very strong on teacher buy-in? What conclusions does he draw from its favourable ranking in the PISA table compared with us?

Graham Stuart: The hon. Gentleman is right to lay down that challenge—though before mentioning Finland, he said he remained in favour of tests too. When a system moves to a certain level of excellence, as in Finland, and starts to recruit teachers from the top 30% of graduates in the country, and when 10 people are competing for each job—these are old data, admittedly—not only does it get people with high academic ability but it can select on empathy, enthusiasm and other skills as well, and then has a first-class workforce.

We are a much bigger country with different challenges, and we do not recruit our teaching workforce from the same pool as Finland. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman ever saw the work by McKinsey about how good systems keep getting better. It is a fairly basic thing when one hears it, but one has to hear it to realise it. Systems are different and require different interventions at different points in their development. I look forward to the day when we have such a self-confident, self-critical, self-improving education system that we can slowly cut down Ofsted and the accountability system and leave it to keep improving by itself. The reason why the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, the hon. Member for Southport and my hon. Friends have not reached that point is that we do not yet have the confidence, but I hope that one day it will come.

I have one final point on the issue of children's stress. It is important not to talk up lurid references to failure and it is important to say to schools generally that they should look at the schools where the children are not showing any stress. Does the system mean that all children have to be stressed? No, because we can find many instances where children are suffering no stress. They can be prepared for SATs without it feeling like some great ordeal coming down the road on which their whole future depends.

The message that the House should send—hopefully from all sides—is that schools should look at and learn from the schools that do not put stress on kids and use the SATs as an “assessment for learning”—call it what we like—rather than making them into an ordeal. Teachers and headteachers need to ensure that whatever the stress they are feeling—they are accountable for their results, so they should be feeling some—they do not pass it on to children. It is possible for that to happen; it does happen; it needs to happen everywhere.

4.55 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Let me state from the outset that I am a child of the '70s when grammar purism was not much taught. I think the Secretary of State and I are of the same vintage—from 1972—so I am not going to be a grammar fascist or purist in this debate. We used to play in the sandpit in those days rather than learn the declensions of nouns.

I want to contribute to today's debate because of a case raised with me over the weekend by a constituent. She is deputy headteacher of Christ the Saviour, a Church of England primary school that is outstanding in all four categories. This is not a Bash Street school gasworks comprehensive or anything like those sort of places. The deputy head, Katie Tramoni, is someone I was at school with. I have lived 44 years in Ealing, so I have spent a lot of time there, and both the schools I attended are in my constituency. I am now a mum, bringing up my own children in the borough.

As I say, Christ the Saviour is a well-regarded school and I was at school with Katie. This weekend, I went to the Acton carnival, and she literally grabbed me by the lapels and said, “Can you tell Nicky Morgan this from me?” When I saw this debate coming up, I thought, “Now is my opportunity.” Katie is worried about the floor standards of key stage 2. Like everyone else, I have read the headlines saying that almost half of 11-year-old primary pupils will not reach the required standard, but Katie's issues are with the marking, so let me raise them directly.

Katie tells me that the KS2 reading paper was so poorly marked that 55 out of 86 papers—64%—had to be returned for re-marking. The quibbles sometimes seem very minor, but it costs the school £9 per paper if the complaint is not upheld. That does not seem to make sense economically, and the school is in fear of sending things back because of that £9 penalty. For the GPS paper—on grammar, punctuation and spelling—the complaint was that the marking scheme was exceptionally harsh. If, for example, a pupil inserts a semi-colon in the correct place in the sentence, but in too large a size so that it comes out larger than the letters, it is marked as wrong. A zero mark is given, and there are many things like that. Katie said, “I know I go on and on. Don't get me started on SATs report; let me know if you need more; I must dash.” It was at 7 o'clock this morning that I noticed this debate was on.

The point has been made by Government Members that we are anti-testing, but that is not the case. We presided over tests for all those years in power. As the Secretary of State pointed out, it was Tony Blair's mantra that his top three priorities were “education, education, education”. We have never been against testing as such, but the particular tests this year have been a dog's dinner and a shambles. I know this from numerous examples in my inbox, in my postbag and when people literally collar me when I am trying to go to a fun event at the weekend. Surely it is the Government's responsibility to make sure that these tests are marked properly.

Nicky Morgan: I appreciate the constructive way in which the hon. Lady is raising her constituent's concerns. If she writes to me or to the Minister for Schools, we will of course convey her views to the Standards and Testing Agency. I should point out that any comments relating to the review of the marking should be submitted

by 15 July. The hon. Lady may wish to encourage her constituent to submit her thoughts, but I hope that she will contact us and let us know, because the whole point of the system is feedback that will enable us to do better in future years.

Dr Huq: I thank the Secretary of State for those constructive and collegiate remarks.

I conduct a great many assemblies in my constituency. Ealing is a leafy suburban borough, and my seat was a Conservative seat as recently as May 2015. While I am standing opposite the Secretary of State, let me point out that one of the issues that arise is the retention rate of teachers in a borough such as Ealing. Headteachers tell me that they can easily recruit trainees in their 20s, but once those young people want to put down roots and settle, they are off to Slough, Milton Keynes, or whatever is the nearest affordable place to live near the M25. I know that this is slightly off the subject, but headteachers have suggested the introduction of tied housing, which exists on some university campuses, because that would make the jobs more attractive. Some heads say that they have lost people to schools where new arrivals can be accommodated in a caretaker's house.

Conservative Members have suggested that this is just an NUT diatribe. That is why I wanted to raise the subject of real people—the kind of people who would naturally have been on their side. If the Government are losing the good will of people who would naturally be conservative with a small “c”, I think that they have problems. My constituent told me that education was in crisis. The word “crisis” is much overused, but she was in despair, shock and anger as she told me that.

Both the Secretary of State and I were guinea pigs in 1988, the first year of GCSEs. I realise that any system will have teething troubles, but I understand that teachers and educationists have begged the Government not to introduce these changes so rapidly, and to wait for a year. We are where we are. I know that “NUT” has been portrayed as something of a dirty word during this debate. However, the NUT's Kevin Courtney has described the key stage 2 SATs as rushed and inappropriate, and has said that the curriculum is wrong and bad tests have been poorly marked. I talked about poor marking earlier. This kind of tinkering has led to chaos and confusion. It seems that these kids are guinea pigs as well. Schools should not be exam factories.

Friday's edition of the *Times Educational Supplement* quotes Brian Walton, the head of Brookside Academy in Somerset, of whom I had never heard. He argues that we have a “results illusion”, and says:

“So much rides on SATs that the real purpose of education is lost”

in “statistical positioning”. It seems that we are being seduced by the numbers, and not recognising the whole child for who that child is. According to some assessments, one in 10 teachers has left the profession as a result of falling morale. The housing issue is intrinsically linked with that in areas such as west London, and something must be done about it. It is worrying that Ealing should be a borough in which its teachers cannot afford to live. We are seeing a hollowing out of our capital, and that is obviously wrong.

Graham Stuart: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Huq: This was really meant to be an intervention, in that it was intended to be very short, but I have managed to spin it out into a speech. I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Graham Stuart: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for spinning out an excellent intervention.

I suppose that what frustrates Conservatives is that the Labour Party wants tests, but then talks about the tensions that they can cause. What kind of tests are required that do not already exist? We have heard nothing constructive from Labour Members. The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) at least suggested that the grammar test might be a bit over the top. What is wrong with these tests that could be put right, and should be put right, for next year? Any suggestion would be helpful.

Dr Huq: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was listening to the anecdote from the deputy head that mentioned earlier, but it seems that this time round the proper curriculum has not been in place, and the marking is all over the place. It is not testing per se that is wrong; it is the maladministration of this year's key stage 2 SATs.

In the recent Brexit debate the Lord Chancellor said we have had enough of experts. That is a real mistake; we ignore the professionals at our peril. These are people at the chalk face. Educationists, heads and deputy headteachers like Katie Tramoni and—dare I say it—the NUT have been warning about this. I hope these problems can be rectified and that we hear from the Secretary of State what will be done to minimise next year's disturbances so that there are no disturbances; otherwise, it will feel as though we are losing sight of the child.

5.5 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq). I resided in that constituency for many years and my eldest daughter went to preschool there, before we escaped to the countryside of East Sussex.

I share the sentiment expressed in the first sentence of this motion: that every child deserves an excellent education that enables them to grow and thrive. In order to deliver this aspiration, it is vital that children are assessed to enable parents and teachers to determine whether the education received is meeting that desired outcome. I therefore welcome the testing at both key stage 1 and key stage 2. The latter is of importance because it will inform parents and secondary schools on the progress reached and development required. The former is of particular importance, for both child and school, in order to assess progress in the intervening four years between each test.

I must declare an interest: having failed my own 12-plus exam, and having attended a secondary school which, by its definition, was for those who had similarly failed, I am disappointed that the motion says that children will be labelled as failures. Instead, these tests should be viewed as methods by which to benchmark progress, not talk about failure.

The motion focuses on the fact that only 53% of children have reached the standard in all three papers. When broken down, the Department for Education's

[*Huw Merriman*]

statistics show that 66% have met the standard in reading, 70% in maths and 72% in grammar. The motion is correct in that the rates for 2016 have reduced compared with those for 2015. However, the very aspect of a comparison is wholly misleading because the tests have been changed and made more difficult. It is therefore unsurprising that we now have grade deflation.

What we have now is a rigorous regime that will help drive up progress and standards and help give every child an excellent education that enables them to grow and thrive. Children will not thrive if the tests are set at a level that do not stretch them and inspire them to do better. We should not be alarmed by this benchmark; we should embrace it and do all that we can to help our children to reach their potential.

Rather than turn back to previous methods, we need to give this new regime the chance to bed in. We also need to give our teachers more time and space to teach our children. In that vein, may I make a few positive suggestions which I hope the Department can take on board?

First, teachers have had to spend time getting to grips with the new curriculum. Can we please therefore give teachers some time back so they can focus on inspiring and teaching our children? As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) said, too many teachers are working long hours and we need to help them.

Secondly, I embrace the need for all children to master English and maths so they have the basics aged 11 years. However, there is more to learning than these two subjects. Last weekend, I spent another morning with my seven-year-old and 10-year-old. One had maths homework, the other English. Can we please have time for science, art, history, geography and other subjects, or at least ask our teachers to use them as the basis for maths and English?

Thirdly, comparing our children with those of other nations whom they will be competing with in the global jobs race is helpful, but can we not be as obsessed about it? Perhaps not all our children master maths as well as, say, a child in India or Singapore. However, if we teach our children to be leaders, to be creative, to think outside the box and to inspire, they will probably end up managing a maths genius from India without the need to be one themselves.

A rigorous educational assessment underpins our desire on these Benches to give better life chances to everyone. There are numerous examples in public life of people enjoying a successful education and going on to have a successful career as a result of having had the support and drive of parents and, perhaps, a private education. However, there are not enough examples of success among those who have endured a difficult start, and who may have grown up in deprived communities where parental emphasis on education was lacking and where there was no one to support or inspire them outside the school gates. For those children, their schooling offers them the only route to a better place. This can make a difference to their health, wellbeing and, ultimately, life expectancy. I urge the House to think of that and to embrace the need to assess our children, as this Government are doing, so that every child can reach their true potential.

5.10 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I want to make a couple of brief comments which I hope the Minister will be able to address when he winds up the debate. I very much agree with what the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) has said on this subject, which is one of the reasons that I wanted to attend the debate today. I am sure that the Secretary of State would also agree that, whatever the rights and wrongs of the way in which SATs are currently administered, there can be no doubt that for many of our outstanding schools and dedicated headteachers and teachers, the harsh reality of the way in which the results have been presented to them has been a huge shock. Some have seen a huge drop in the standards that their schools have attained. In my view, the Secretary of State would have done well to address that point in her speech.

I am sure that we all have outstanding schools in our constituencies. Some of them, for reasons that they find difficult to understand, have seen their results almost collapse. That does not help them, it does not help the Secretary of State in her desire to raise standards, and it does not help any of us. In the end, it is the partnership between the Government, parents and schools that delivers the standards that we all want.

Heidi Allen: Does the hon. Gentleman think that when schools do better than expected, it might sometimes be because the children have been taught very closely in order to get them through the tests, with the breadth of education that my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) mentioned being ignored?

Vernon Coaker: That is a good point. There has always been a danger of teaching to the test. The guidance for Ofsted during my time as a Minister—to be fair, it is the same under the present Government—was to look at the breadth of the curriculum and to see what emphasis was being placed on subjects outside those specifically designed for the SATs. The good schools have drama, history, sport and other things going on alongside the SAT subjects. In my view, the schools that do best in the tests—especially in relation to young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds—are often those that have that breadth of curriculum and that do drama and all those other things as well. Those subjects can give young people the self-esteem and confidence to achieve in the more academic subjects—for want of a better term—that they have to study.

Will the Minister tell us what he is going to do restore confidence among our teachers? Whatever the rights and wrongs of this, some people in my constituency have been absolutely distraught at the results they have been given. That cannot be right. I am not saying this to make a point; this is a statement of fact. Even in schools that are regarded as outstanding, headteachers have been crying. That cannot be what we want. Let us just reflect on all that. We know that 53% met the Government's targets, while 47% did not. Perhaps we do not want to use the word "failure". Is there something of particular concern in the three components? Is one area weaker than the others? Do we need to do something about maths? How are the Government, working with both sides of the House and the unions, going to ensure that we tackle the 47%?

Andrew Gwynne: My hon. Friend makes an important point about partnership. Where the tone of this debate has gone wrong today is that we have had comments like “Tory bad, Labour good,” “Labour bad, Tory good,” “Unions right, Government wrong,” and “Government right, unions wrong.” However, we owe it to our schools and teachers to work in partnership, because we all want our children to succeed, standards to improve and the United Kingdom to rise in the global league tables.

Vernon Coaker: I agree. Standards have risen over the past couple of decades, but we want them to rise faster. There is still too much inequality and social background still determines educational attainment. We should not blame people; we should ask what is preventing this country from overcoming something that has bedevilled the education system for decades. No one would stand up and say that we want the situation to continue. The question is how we best meet the challenge.

Given the embarrassment of the leaked and abandoned tests, what will the Minister do to improve security in the future? What is his response to the criticism of how the new tests relate to the new curriculum? It was introduced in 2014 and tests are being set on it in 2016—two years for a four-year course. Will that be taken into account? What has been said to schools? Next year, we will be three years into a four-year programme, so will that mean anything for next year’s testing? We all want to hear about that. It would be ridiculous to pretend that this year’s SATs have been an unmitigated success given the real problems. What are the Government going to do about that? How will they improve things? That is what parents, schools and all of us want to hear.

What will the key stage 2 results mean for schools’ Ofsted categorisation? If a school has seen its results collapse, what will that mean when Ofsted go in in September? I do not know the answer, which is why I am asking. The Secretary of State is nodding her head, but I do not know the answer. People want clarity. What will the results mean for a school’s Ofsted categorisation? If the Government set a standard and large numbers of pupils fall below it, including those at schools currently categorised as outstanding, what will that mean when Ofsted inspectors go in? Will the school get cast out? Perhaps not, but that is what schools want to—*[Interruption.]* The Minister will respond to that to reassure people—thank you.

The SATs have had real problems. Everybody in the House agrees that we need to improve standards. We will never reach a point at which we are all satisfied. Everyone will always want more, but what are we going to do about the problems? How will the tests that have been introduced allow us to build on any progress? What are we doing to reassure schools? What are we doing to reassure headteachers, teachers and parents? What will be different next year to prevent what has happened this year from happening again? Those are the sorts of questions that I was trying to intervene on the Secretary of State to ask. I was not trying to get up and say, “Tories wicked, Labour brilliant.” I just wanted to ask, because, with respect, I thought that people were not going to get answers to their detailed questions. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) will no doubt ask similar questions, but I will be grateful if the Minister answers some of them and makes some other points.

5.19 pm

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. First, I should comment on the uniformly thoughtful and interesting contributions from Back Benchers. Let me begin by mentioning the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), who challenged the Secretary of State on the whole issue of secondary improvements. Although that is not the subject of this debate, secondary schools would be assisted if they and their heads did not have to worry about how to play catch-up on key stage 2 SATs fails.

The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), in a thoughtful speech, was rightfully caustic about some of the Secretary of State’s newspeak on SATs. His quote from one of his respected local headteachers about this being “one big mess” is devastating, so we should all take it into account. It is worth mentioning that, in a survey, 97% of primary teachers and leaders expressed concern that schools were preparing pupils for the tests at the expense of the wider curriculum, and other Members have spoken about that today. The hon. Gentleman also talked about a sense of common enterprise. His contribution, like others, pointed out that we need not only a sense of common enterprise, but evidence-driven policy.

The hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), the former Chair of the Education Committee, used the interesting word “volatility” to describe what has happened this year. That was not a great word to use; his five years as Chair might have given him a choicer set of words to describe the fiasco of the process and outcomes that this year’s SATs have left us with. He also talked about the need for people to row back in, but surely the whole problem is that the specs were not there in time for them to do so. That point needs to be taken on board.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) struck a chord with many Members by talking about the way in which we need to keep our teachers with us. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) regaled us with tales of her days, and perhaps the Secretary of State’s days, in the sandpit. Apart from that, the most enlightening thing in my hon. Friend’s speech was when she relayed what her local headteacher, Katie, said. Perhaps it should have been what Katie did and what Katie did next. To be fair, the Secretary of State was gracious and told us what Katie needs to do next: get her thoughts in before 15 July. Again, this raises the issue that people can have legitimate concerns without being anti-testing.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said that the tests should not be set to a low benchmark. Nobody in the House would dispute that point. He said that there needs to be more time for prep and more time for learning subjects other than English and maths. Perhaps we can welcome him as an additional recruit to those of us who talked to the Minister last week about the need to widen the EBacc.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) rightly expressed concerns that some of the outstanding schools in his constituency have had bizarrely low results. He also rightly asked what the Government would do about the security of the tests. I hope that the Minister will take on board those issues in his response.

[Mr Gordon Marsden]

My hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State got an unfair blistering from the Secretary of State. My colleague painted a stark picture of the strengths and skills of the young people who took the tests this year being cast aside or ignored because they have been the guinea pigs and victims of the Department's shambles this year. She did show passion, and she needed to do so, because the pupils who took this year's key stage 2 SATs have been very badly let down. Why is that? It is because the Department's resources and Ministers' focus were obsessively trained on their national programme of academisation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), among others, said when the previous statement was made, they took their eye off the ball. Tens of thousands of children have suffered, and for what? For a humiliating climbdown on forced academisation under fire from the Government's own side, which now means that the Secretary of State will have to swerve and dodge in the academy-lite education Bill that may or may not come this autumn or under this Secretary of State.

In this instance, process cannot be divorced from outcome. Russell Hobby, the general secretary of the NAHT, was quite right to say that the Government had made

“serious mistakes in the planning and implementation of tests this year”

and

“with the delays and confusion in guideline materials.”

The Minister for Schools said in this House on 10 May that Pearson UK was investigating the uploading of the key stage test on to a website and was committed to investigating it quickly. I do not recall whether we have had a full explanation of that from the Minister, so I ask him to give us one now. I also echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling said by asking the Minister to tell us what steps he has put in place to reduce the possibility of this happening again.

The Secretary of State wanted to cloud talk of her failures by saying that this was all driven by an NUT plot. If she were to pause for a moment from her rant about the NUT, perhaps she would like to look at the joint statement that the National Governors Association and the NAHT put out. They said that schools did not need to draw conclusions from the SATs data because they provide

“no intelligence on the rate of improvement of teaching and learning.”

They went on to point out that many will be “feeling demoralised”, saying:

“Pupils, teachers and parents and all involved in schools should be proud of the work they have put in to implement”—

the new curriculum and the testing regime—

“in what has been a very short timetable.”

It is simply not good enough for the Secretary of State to be complacent about this matter. The Government's complacency has already been commented on by the Public Accounts Committee, although that does not seem to have affected the Secretary of State's ability to be Madam Pangloss on the issue. In her first response to the results, she said that they had been a “good

start”, but Anne Watson, who was the emeritus professor of mathematics education at the University of Oxford, said:

“The aim to raise standards has resulted in a new way to measure performance so that no comparative judgments can be made... This means we do not know from the data alone whether the Government has done a good job or a bad job and whether the test designers and score-scalers have done a good job or a bad job.”

After all, these results mean that, according to this Government, 47% of children in this country are not ready for secondary school. How do we tell children and their parents that?

The Secretary of State—the Minister has said this on another occasion—talked about the fact that pupils either “don't mind” or “enjoy” taking these tests, and the ComRes poll gave them some comfort in that respect. Pupils might not mind taking the test, but they mind with absolute justification the test being taken out of context and their teachers being left frustrated that they are not able to engage at an early enough stage.

When the Minister made his statement in May, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe made an absolutely key point:

“By rushing ahead with the policy without properly involving professionals or parents, the Government failed to spot the fundamental flaw in the design, which was that the test that they had developed were insufficiently comparable. As a result, they were forced to abandon their approach to baseline test entirely.”

He went on to say:

“There has been a constant stream of chop and change in primary assessment under this Government. Since September, the Department for Education has updated or clarified on average at least one primary school assessment resource every other working day.”—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2016; Vol. 609, c. 554.]

We do not regard that as good enough.

On the floor standard, I think the Secretary of State said that the details would be made available in September, yet her Department told *Schools Week* that the results would not be published until December. Whether it is September or December—the Secretary of State or the Minister is welcome to clarify this—what an indictment it is that schools should have that sword of Damocles over their head for four or six months.

Ultimately, this comes down to what happens in individual Members' constituencies and the responses that they get. In my own area of Lancashire, the spokesman for the National Association of Head Teachers said that, with 94% of Lancashire schools judged good or outstanding by Ofsted,

“there is something wrong in the assessment process”,

and that schools need to support their children and their staff

“and carry out what is effectively damage limitation.”

Last Friday I visited one of my primary schools in Blackpool, where the head and others are doing some extremely good work. I observed a session with an excellent Pobble literacy tutor, but when I spoke afterwards to the head, he had a huge sense of frustration that the school had not been able to structure its exam preparation because of the continuous chopping and changing to which I and my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe have referred. The head said, “I fear it will put more pressure on testing in these students' first year in secondary schools.” The schools will not regard the tests as useful,

and the consequence will be deflated students and pressured parents—those are my observations, not those of the head.

The years between the ages of nine and 11 are almost as crucial for young people as the time of transfer to secondary school. I am old enough—I suspect that others in the Chamber may be old enough—to remember the nine-plus. I remember from doing the nine-plus that it was a testing time, so it is not good enough for the Minister and the Secretary of State to draw a veil over this year's results by setting up straw people and saying that the Opposition or other critics are not interested in testing or in standards. We are interested in both, but we are also interested in their being delivered competently, and this Government have not shown competence.

5.33 pm

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): This has been a good debate, if a short one, about how we ensure that children leave primary school fluent in the basic building blocks of an education. Over the past six years this Government have been determined to ensure that our education system is properly equipping the next generation of school leavers with the knowledge and skills that they need for life in the modern economy, and the ability to compete in an increasingly global jobs market.

Under the remarkable leadership of the Prime Minister and of my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), now the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, and my right hon. Friend the current Secretary of State for Education, we have introduced the most far-reaching education reforms for generations—reforms which are working.

Of course, it would have been easier not to have engaged with the reforms, and to have allowed the continued inflation of results—the year-on-year increases in GCSE grades and SAT test results—masking our decline in standards compared with the most successful education systems in the world. It would have been easier not to take on the vested interests; easier not to embark on raising the bar; easier not to demand phonics; easier not to look at better ways of teaching maths; easier not to challenge the publishers and demand better textbooks; easier not to insist on more pupils taking the core academic subjects that make up the EBacc; easier not to increase the numbers taking foreign languages; easier not to encourage more take-up of maths and physics A-levels.

But we were determined to halt Britain's decline in the PISA international league tables, which showed the UK falling from seventh in reading in 2000 to 25th by 2009, and from eighth in maths to 28th, and we fell further still in the 2012 PISA survey. We therefore appointed a panel of experts, who examined the curricula of those countries that topped the PISA rankings. We produced a new primary national curriculum, which we consulted on in 2012 and finalised in 2013, and which came into force in 2014, with the first new SATs tests taken two years later, in May 2016.

The new curriculum requires fluency in reading, and it requires phonics in the early years of primary school, followed by a focus on developing a habit of reading. Spelling and handwriting techniques, and grammar and punctuation, which were neglected for decades, have been restored to the school curriculum.

In maths, we looked to the Singapore primary maths curriculum, ensuring fluency in calculation technique, long multiplication, long division and fractions. We reduced the age by which all children should know their times tables from 11 to nine. This year, we piloted a computer-based multiplication tables test. I visit schools up and down the country, and I see more and more pupils fluent in their times tables. That was not so six years ago.

The academic year 2015 was always going to be a challenge, with the new maths and English GCSEs being introduced for first teaching from September 2015. The new, revised GCSEs are on a par with the qualifications taught in the best-performing countries in the world. That is what the education reforms are about: raising academic standards in our schools, raising expectations and raising aspiration. And they are working. The focus on phonics has raised reading standards. In 2011, when we trialled the new phonics check—a short test to ensure six-year-olds are mastering the basic skill of reading simple words—just 32% passed. In 2012, 58% passed, and that rose to 69% in 2013, 74% in 2014 and 77% last year. That means that 120,000 more six-year-olds today are reading more effectively than they otherwise would, because of this Government's reforms and the focus on phonics.

The new SATs in reading are designed to resist teaching to the test. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) hinted, the way for pupils to do well is to have read a lot during their time at primary school—to have read increasingly challenging books and to have developed the habit of reading regularly. That is why 88% of pupils at Harris Primary Academy Peckham Park reached the expected standard in the new reading test. It is why 88% at Elmhurst Primary School in Newham reached at least the expected standard in reading.

The new maths SATs are made up of one arithmetic paper and two maths reasoning papers. The only way to do well is to ensure that pupils are not only fluent in mathematical calculation, but have a deep, conceptual understanding that comes from practice and good teaching. That is why 94% of pupils at Elmhurst Primary School achieved at least the expected standard and 96% of pupils at Harris Junior Academy Carshalton reached at least the expected standard.

The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) read a letter from an experienced headteacher in his constituency to his pupils. However, the tests are designed, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, to hold schools to account, not pupils. We know we are asking more, but we are doing that because we are committed to giving young people the best start in life.

This year's results are the first to be released following the introduction of a more rigorous national curriculum, which is on a par with the best in the world. The results show that there is no limit to our children's potential, and that schools can rise to the challenge of ensuring that pupils meet the new, higher standards. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) pointed out, neither schools nor parents should try to compare this year's results with those in previous years; they simply cannot be compared directly. We have published data to show the national averages for the number of pupils meeting the new expected standard. That allows schools to see how their pupils have performed against

[Mr Nick Gibb]

the national average, which is a much more useful comparison for schools and parents.

The hon. Member for Southport also raised the challenge of the new grammar test. I have to tell him that the national curriculum tests that were sat this May took over three years to develop. During that process, they go through three rounds of expert review, which includes teachers, curriculum experts, markers, special educational needs and disability experts, inclusion experts and cultural experts. The questions are also trialled twice with pupils at the appropriate age—once to check that the questions are functioning as required and that children give appropriate answers, and once to determine the difficulty of the questions, which are improved throughout the process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) asked the relevant questions about whether we, as a country, are doing a good enough job in educating our young people. As he said, too many children are not given enough knowledge and skills to flourish in secondary school. He is right to point out that there are always challenges when new tests are introduced, but as the tests bed down, teachers become more familiar with the curriculum.

The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) cited the headteacher at Christ the Saviour Church of England Primary School, an outstanding school in her constituency, as being worried about the floor standards. The Secretary of State has made it clear that given the greater challenge of the new SATs, the number of schools regarded as being below the floor will not be greater than 1 percentage point more than last year. In response to the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden), we are publishing provisional progress figures early in September so that schools will know if they are below the floor. The December figure is the finalised figure after adjustments for errors.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle pointed out that there is more to education than English and maths, and that we need more time in primary school for science, for art, for history and for geography. I totally agree. A knowledge-rich curriculum is key, and that is what the best primary schools in this country are delivering.

The hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) says he knows of too many schools that have seen a sharp drop in their results this year. He is right that the results will focus the minds of the schools that are struggling to deliver the results that other schools in similar circumstances are delivering, and we will help them with that challenge. The stage 1 national funding formula consultation shows that we are proposing to introduce a lower prior attainment factor that will provide extra support to help children catch up.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Ofsted and the impact that it will have through the new, more challenging assessments. I have acknowledged that point. I have already written to Sir Michael Wilshaw to ask Ofsted to take into account, when inspectors examine schools, the fact that this is the first year of much more challenging tests and a much more challenging curriculum.

Vernon Coaker: For me, this is one of the most fundamental points. What does the phrase “take into account” mean? Does it mean that Ofsted reads it and

then does nothing about it? I appreciate its independence, but this is a fundamental point. I have been where the Minister is in taking these things into account and looking into them, and so on, but schools absolutely want reassurance about whether they are going to go from being outstanding to being at risk. It would be helpful if he said a little more about that.

Mr Gibb: Experience so far is that inspectors are already taking my letter into account and adjusting their judgments. They are not looking at raw data in an unintelligent way; they are looking at it intelligently, reflecting the concerns raised in my letter. We have also now introduced the progress measure, which means that progress will be a much more important part of determining whether a school falls below the floor.

The hon. Member for Blackpool South asked about Pearson. It has investigated the leak and taken a number of steps to ensure that rogue markers do not deliberately release marking schemes in future, and it is tightening up its contractual arrangements.

As a result of this Government’s education reform, 66% of secondary schools and 19% of primary schools now have academy status, with the professional autonomy that this brings. A total of 1.45 million more pupils are in schools rated “good” or “outstanding” by Ofsted than in 2010. More pupils are taking and securing good grades in the core academic subjects at GCSE that employers and universities most value. More pupils are studying foreign languages and taking A-levels in maths, physics and chemistry. As a result of our reforms more children are reading fluently, and doing so earlier.

I was saddened by the approach taken by the new shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner). Yesterday, in a Westminster Hall debate on term-time holidays, she supported our reforms to improve school attendance. Today, she is reverting to the approach of her predecessor-but-one, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), in opposing the rise in academic standards and the rise in expectations that the new SATs reflect and assess. She is, alas, simply kowtowing to the NUT “line to take”. This Government are about raising standards, raising expectations and delivering successful and effective reform. I urge the House to reject Labour’s motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 178, Noes 278.

Division No. 43]

[5.45 pm

AYES

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Abbott, Ms Diane | Brown, rh Mr Nicholas |
| Abrahams, Debbie | Bryant, Chris |
| Alexander, Heidi | Buck, Ms Karen |
| Ali, Rushanara | Burden, Richard |
| Allen, Mr Graham | Burgon, Richard |
| Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena | Butler, Dawn |
| Bailey, Mr Adrian | Byrne, rh Liam |
| Barron, rh Kevin | Cadbury, Ruth |
| Benn, rh Hilary | Campbell, rh Mr Alan |
| Betts, Mr Clive | Carmichael, rh Mr |
| Blackman-Woods, Dr | Alistair |
| Roberta | Champion, Sarah |
| Blomfield, Paul | Chapman, Jenny |
| Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben | Coaker, Vernon |
| Brake, rh Tom | Cooper, Julie |
| Brennan, Kevin | Cooper, Rosie |

Cooper, rh Yvette
 Coyle, Neil
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Farron, Tim
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Fello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lucas, Caroline
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 McCabe, Steve
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Murray, Ian
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Owen, Albert
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Tami, Mark
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie

West, Catherine
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Winnick, Mr David

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Argar, Edward
 Atkins, Victoria
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Berry, James
 Blackman, Bob
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James
 Bruce, Fiona
 Buckland, Robert
 Burns, Conor
 Burns, rh Sir Simon
 Burrowes, Mr David
 Burt, rh Alistair
 Cairns, rh Alun
 Carmichael, Neil
 Cartledge, James
 Cash, Sir William
 Caulfield, Maria
 Chalk, Alex
 Chishti, Rehman
 Chope, Mr Christopher
 Churchill, Jo
 Clark, rh Greg
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
 Cleverly, James
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse
 Colvile, Oliver
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey
 Crabb, rh Stephen
 Crouch, Tracey
 Davies, Byron
 Davies, Chris
 Davies, David T. C.
 Davies, Glyn
 Davies, Dr James
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Mr David
 Dinenage, Caroline
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Donelan, Michelle
 Double, Steve
 Dowden, Oliver

Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Holly Lynch and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Doyle-Price, Jackie
 Drax, Richard
 Drummond, Mrs Flick
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
 Dunne, Mr Philip
 Ellis, Michael
 Ellison, Jane
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias
 Elphicke, Charlie
 Eustice, George
 Evans, Graham
 Evans, Mr Nigel
 Evennett, rh Mr David
 Fallon, rh Michael
 Fernandes, Suella
 Field, rh Mark
 Foster, Kevin
 Fox, rh Dr Liam
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon

Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr
 Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill

Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wragg, William

Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Simon Kirby and
 Sarah Newton

Question accordingly negatived.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

INCOME TAX

That the draft Major Sporting Events (Income Tax Exemption) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 27 June, be approved.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put,

SENIOR COURTS OF ENGLAND AND WALES

That the draft Civil Proceedings, First-tier Tribunal, Upper Tribunal and Employment Tribunals Fees (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 26 May, be approved.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

The House divided: Ayes 278, Noes 218.

Division No. 44]

[5.58 pm

AYES

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Adams, Nigel | Churchill, Jo |
| Afriyie, Adam | Clark, rh Greg |
| Aldous, Peter | Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth |
| Allan, Lucy | Cleverly, James |
| Allen, Heidi | Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey |
| Amess, Sir David | Coffey, Dr Thérèse |
| Andrew, Stuart | Colville, Oliver |
| Argar, Edward | Costa, Alberto |
| Atkins, Victoria | Cox, Mr Geoffrey |
| Baker, Mr Steve | Crabb, rh Stephen |
| Baldwin, Harriett | Crouch, Tracey |
| Barclay, Stephen | Davies, Byron |
| Barwell, Gavin | Davies, Chris |
| Bebb, Guto | Davies, David T. C. |
| Bellingham, Sir Henry | Davies, Glyn |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Davies, Dr James |
| Berry, Jake | Davies, Mims |
| Berry, James | Davis, rh Mr David |
| Blackman, Bob | Dinenage, Caroline |
| Boles, Nick | Djanogly, Mr Jonathan |
| Bone, Mr Peter | Donelan, Michelle |
| Bradley, Karen | Double, Steve |
| Brady, Mr Graham | Dowden, Oliver |
| Brazier, Mr Julian | Doyle-Price, Jackie |
| Bridgen, Andrew | Drax, Richard |
| Brine, Steve | Drummond, Mrs Flick |
| Brokenshire, rh James | Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain |
| Bruce, Fiona | Dunne, Mr Philip |
| Buckland, Robert | Ellis, Michael |
| Burns, Conor | Ellison, Jane |
| Burns, rh Sir Simon | Ellwood, Mr Tobias |
| Burrowes, Mr David | Elphicke, Charlie |
| Burt, rh Alistair | Eustice, George |
| Cairns, rh Alun | Evans, Graham |
| Carmichael, Neil | Evans, Mr Nigel |
| Cartledge, James | Evennett, rh Mr David |
| Cash, Sir William | Fallon, rh Michael |
| Caulfield, Maria | Fernandes, Suella |
| Chalk, Alex | Field, rh Mark |
| Chishti, Rehman | Foster, Kevin |
| Chope, Mr Christopher | Fox, rh Dr Liam |

Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Frazer, Lucy
 Freeman, George
 Freer, Mike
 Fuller, Richard
 Fysh, Marcus
 Gale, Sir Roger
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heappey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline

Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Nokes, Caroline
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris

Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig

Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Sarah Newton and
 Simon Kirby

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Arkless, Richard
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Coaker, Vernon
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Elmore, Chris
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen

Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Law, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lucas, Caroline
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Newlands, Gavin
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten

Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Rotheram, Steve
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smeeth, Ruth
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Spellar, rh Mr John
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Derek
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Winnick, Mr David
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Holly Lynch and
Jeff Smith

PETITION

Dr Keilloh and the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service

6.9 pm

Rishi Sunak (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): I rise to present a petition relating to Dr Keilloh and the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service. Over 3,000 petitioners believe that Dr Keilloh has suffered a miscarriage of justice and would like him reinstated as a practising medical doctor.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to take note of the damage done to Doctor Keilloh's life and career by what the petitioners believe to have been a flawed disciplinary process; and call on the House to urge the Government to re-examine the statutory basis for the jurisdiction of the MPTS with a view to remedying this and potential future injustices; and to urge the Government to open an investigation into the written statements from the Iraqi witnesses as presented by Public Interest Lawyers, and the evidence they gave under cross examination in the Al-Sweady inquiry, the original British army court-martial in the Baha Mousa case, the Baha Mousa Public Inquiry and Dr Keilloh's Fitness to Practice hearing.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the petitioners believe that the decision made by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service (MPTS) to remove Doctor Derek Keilloh from the Medical Practitioners Register was a travesty of justice; further that the petitioners believe that it was not in the public interest to have a community deprived of their so obviously well-loved and much appreciated family doctor; further that the petitioners believe that it is unfair that any appeal against the decision can only be made within 28 days when the doctor has just been deprived of his or her income, and no longer has financial support for legal affairs and is in a state of shock; further that the petitioners call into question why well documented 'inattentional blindness' was not taken into consideration during the MPTS hearing; further that the Professional Standards Authority only exists to protect patients and will only investigate Fitness to Practise outcomes if they believe that the sanctions have been too lenient, not if the patients complain that the sanction has been too severe, prejudiced or faulty; further that there is no equivalent body to support the registrants; further that previously a handwritten petition from 1,034 patients and colleagues was sent to the MPTS and to Parliament in 2013 asking for his re-instatement; further that the petitioners have been informed that the new statutory rules governing MPTS procedures 'Adjudication Section 60 Order' which were brought about in December 2015 now allow the General Medical Council (GMC) to review the MPTS decisions, the petitioners believe that although it probably cannot be post-dated the new ruling should make a difference in bringing about justice in this case; further that the petitioners believe that the case was prejudiced by the publication of damning articles in the media, some of which quote the MPTS tribunal chairperson as pronouncing Doctor Keilloh guilty even before the commencement of the hearing; further that the petitioners call into question that the MPTS panel of three people was able to strike Doctor Keilloh off on probability which was not beyond reasonable doubt for supposed public interest failing rather than any

Question accordingly agreed to.

clinical failing; further that the petitioners believe that the complainant against Doctor Keilloh was Phil Shiner of Public Interest Lawyers, a lawyer acting on behalf of complainants not from this country, about an event in a war zone almost ten years ago, rather than from his NHS patients who are the people who have suffered from Doctor Keilloh's erasure; further that the petitioners believe that in this case written statements from witnesses for the prosecution, presented by Phil Shiner, the lawyer acting on their behalf, were accepted by the MPTS panel without opportunity for cross examination; further that the Al-Sweady inquiry collapsed due to a lack of convincing evidence some of which was presented by Phil Shiner; further that the petitioners understand that Phil Shiner has been under investigation for professional misconduct by the Solicitors Regulation Authority and is now to face a tribunal; and further that an online petition on a similar matter has been signed by 3,496 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request the House of Commons to take note of the damage done to Doctor Keilloh's life and career by what the petitioners believe to have been a flawed disciplinary process; and call on the House to urge the Government to re-examine the statutory basis for the jurisdiction of the MPTS with a view to remedying this and potential future injustices; and to urge the Government to open an investigation into the written statements from the Iraqi witnesses as presented by Public Interest Lawyers, and the evidence they gave under cross examination in the Al-Sweady inquiry, the original British army court-martial in the Baha Mousa case, the Baha Mousa Public Inquiry and Dr Keilloh's Fitness to Practice hearing.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[P001700]

Supported Housing

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(George Hollingbery.)

6.10 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I am pleased to have secured this debate in the week before the start of the summer recess. While the Government are carrying out a review of supported housing, it is important both to obtain a progress report from the Minister as to how it is going and to re-emphasise the vital importance of putting the funding of supported housing on a sustainable long-term footing. It is absolutely essential that we do this, so as not to let down a very vulnerable group of people, whether they are elderly, young, have a physical disability, have suffered domestic violence or face mental health challenges. I seek to be helpful and not hostile, but those involved in the sector are very worried about the future, and it is vital that the Government know their concerns and take them fully into account in producing their proposals, which I hope will be available shortly.

The one-year exemption for supported housing from the 1% rent reduction for social housing landlords and the one-year delay in applying local housing allowance caps to residents in supported housing provide some breathing space, but the clock is ticking down to 2017, when this one-year grace period expires. It is important to have new policies in place well before then, so as not only to remove worries about the viability of existing schemes but to act as a catalyst for attracting much needed new investment in the sector.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and raising important issues about the barriers to good care that a lack of the right supported housing can lead to for people with learning disabilities and mental illness. Does he agree that on a daily basis many mental health wards struggle to find suitable step-down and community housing for patients who badly need it because, as he is outlining, this issue has not been properly gripped?

Peter Aldous: I thank my hon. Friend and Suffolk neighbour for his intervention. Yes, I agree that we need to tackle this issue very quickly.

This week, I joined the National Housing Federation's Starts at Home campaign, which aims to highlight the unique benefits of supported housing and to show why it is so important to individuals and society. It seeks to secure a commitment from the Government to ensure that everyone can have a home that meets their unique needs. Over the past three months, I have received representations from, had meetings with and visited a wide variety of organisations, national and local, all concerned about the sector's future. As well as the National Housing Federation, these include the Home Group, Homeless Link, the Local Government Association, Suffolk County Council, the Salvation Army, Papworth Trust and Give us a Chance, which, as well as providing accommodation, helps young people into work and sustainable employment.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman also aware of the Cambridge housing group providing sheltered housing in my constituency? It warns

[Daniel Zeichner]

that the changes to the housing cap could cost it up to £500,000 a year and plunge four of its key schemes in the city into financial chaos.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue. I come across many such cases, and I shall produce some statistics to confirm it. It is very important to have specific case studies on the ground that emphasise the serious nature of the problem we face.

There are also local providers in Suffolk and in my own constituency, such as Access Community Trust, Stonham, Orwell housing association and the Professional Deputy Service, that provide advice and support to vulnerable dependent people. There are charities and social investors either already active in the sector or wanting to get involved, such as Emmaus, Cheyne's Social Property Impact Fund and HB Villages. The depth and breadth of interest and concern emphasise the importance of putting in place a sustainable framework for the future funding of supported housing and the need to do so quickly.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I echo the welcome of my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) for this debate. Is not "alacrity" the key word, in that 9,270 units—80% of all pipeline development in specialist housing—are under threat? Welcome though the review is, what we need is a quick decision from the Government to put on a firmer footing the long-term sustainable funding of specialist housing.

Peter Aldous: I thank my hon. Friend that intervention. He is right that we are getting to a stage when speed is very much of the essence.

The case for supported housing is compelling. There is a rising demand for care and support owing to an ageing population and increased levels of mental health and learning disabilities. As the National Housing Federation has pointed out, supported housing enables older people to retain their independence, and young people to live securely and in some cases to get their lives back on track; it ensures that victims of domestic violence are able to find emergency refuge and to stabilise their lives; it helps homeless people with complex and multiple needs to make the transition from living on the street to a settled home with education, training or employment; and it ensures that people with mental health needs can stabilise their lives and live more independently.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): I want to say to the Minister that my hon. Friend has hit the nub of the problem. Such housing units have all these additional costs, which raises the issue of whether introducing this cap is at all appropriate for supported housing. Perhaps the Government should take stock and think again about what exactly is done in this sector.

Peter Aldous: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I shall come on to make that very point.

The National Housing Federation has also pointed out that ex-servicemen and women are able to find a stable home, and this includes those with mental health and physical disability needs; and that people with learning disabilities are able to maximise their independence and to exercise choice and control over their lives. It should also be pointed out that investment in supported housing can provide an alternative to more expensive residential care settings.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on a very important subject. Does he acknowledge that the Homes and Communities Agency has identified savings to the taxpayer of £640 million through investment in supported housing?

Mr Speaker: Order. I did not interrupt while the hon. Gentleman was in full flow, but I must point out that by very long-standing convention, we cannot have interventions from Opposition Front-Bench Members in Adjournment debates. It looks as though the hon. Gentleman was not aware of that convention, but he is now.

Peter Aldous: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I, too, am now aware of that convention, although the hon. Gentleman's point was a good one.

The development of new supported housing schemes using innovative models is of vital strategic importance to councils providing adult social care services. It will help them meet the care and support needs of an ageing population, making the best use of limited budgets. Such models provide people with greater independence, meet the support needs of individuals and are more cost-effective than residential provision.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I apologise for missing the first few words of my hon. Friend's speech. He is making a strong case.

Worcestershire County Council, which has contacted me, fears that some of the schemes on which it is working with Fortis Living and the Rooftop Housing Group may be under threat as a result of this application of the cap. The council wanted me to ensure that my hon. Friend expressed those concerns this evening.

Peter Aldous: The position in Suffolk is the same as the position in Worcestershire.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has been very generous in giving way, and he is making a powerful speech. Insecurity about funding, and the funding model, makes it difficult for a number of housing associations, including Stonham, to develop new products and secure the investment that they need in order to help people to maintain their independence in supported housing in a cost-effective way. Is that not the nub of the problem?

Peter Aldous: The hon. Lady is right. We are experiencing a period of limbo and uncertainty in which nothing is happening, and schemes that are desperately needed are not being developed.

Research shows that when a person with learning disabilities moves from residential care to supported living, about £185 per week can be saved. If that is

extrapolated nationally, it means a saving of at least £72 million per annum for social care commissioning budgets. However, specialised supported housing has other advantages in comparison with residential care. In a care home, the minimum standard for an individual room is 12 square metres, whereas in an apartment in specialised supported housing it is about 50 square metres. In a care home, support is organised to meet the demands of group living, whereas in specialised supported housing it is tailored to meet the needs of the individual.

The Homes and Communities Agency has found that supported housing provision has a net positive benefit of £640 million for UK taxpayers. At present there is a shortage of 15,640 places, or 14% of supply, and if the current trends continue, the shortfall will double by 2019-20. Furthermore, there are 30,000 people in the UK with learning difficulties who are over 70 and still living with their parents. According to research conducted by Papworth Trust, 1.8 million people require some form of accessible housing, and the number is growing year on year. When disabled people are living in accessible homes that meet their needs, their quality of life is dramatically enhanced, and their job prospects also benefit.

The message is clear: there is a compelling case for supported housing, demand for which is increasing year by year. If we do not put its funding on a secure, sustainable long-term footing, a significant proportion of existing supported housing schemes will be forced to close, which will leave many vulnerable and disadvantaged people with nowhere to live. Moreover, the much needed new accommodation will not be built.

If we are to find a sustainable long-term solution to the problem of funding for supported housing, it is necessary to think outside the narrow departmental confines of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions. It is necessary to break out of the silos, and to think holistically. Supported housing is not just a matter for the DCLG and the DWP, because it is not just about housing and benefits. It is a case for the Department of Health, as it concerns physical and mental healthcare. It is a job for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, as it concerns the preparation of vulnerable people for the workplace. It is a case for councils, whether it involves housing authorities or social care providers. It is of interest to housing associations, charities and social investors who are keen to pursue innovative projects that would change people's lives. Achieving good supported housing requires a focused partnership between housing authorities, housing associations, care and support providers, and councils delivering social care.

What all that means is that supported housing is not just about housing. Because it delivers benefits far beyond the walls of the DWP and the DCLG, it is appropriate to consider securing funding from a wide range of potential sources, including other Departments. In the fullness of time, devolved government may also have a role to play.

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend is making a typically powerful speech. Does he agree that each year we have delayed discharge crises across acute hospital trusts in England, and were we to think long term about how we

fund supported housing, it could pay for itself in terms of a reduction in the cost to the taxpayer of these crises, which happen every winter?

Peter Aldous: My hon. Friend makes a good point. If we raise our eyes and think long term, instead of just short term, savings will be produced that can deliver the far better, high-quality supported housing we need.

Dr Poulter: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reality on the ground is that the lack of suitable supported housing is leading to hospitals and mental health wards having to discharge people either on to the streets in some cases, which is most undesirable as they will include some very vulnerable people, or into other very unsuitable housing situations? This issue needs to be addressed, and conversations need to be had with the Department of Health to make that happen.

Peter Aldous: I agree. It is important not to look at a specific type of housing in silos, because all types of housing are interrelated: we cause a problem in one, and it has a negative spin-off effect in another.

The prospect of the local housing allowance cap being applied to residents in supported housing after the one-year delay is causing considerable unease and concern in the sector. With housing benefit set to be abolished as part of the roll-out of universal credit, it is appropriate for the Government to review the future funding of supported housing. However, feedback from the National Housing Federation reveals that the threat of a crude LHA cap is having a detrimental effect.

Some 24% of supported housing providers have told the NHF that all their supported and sheltered housing units are at risk of becoming unviable and of closing. It is estimated that 156,000 units of existing supported and sheltered housing would become unviable and at risk of closure; that is 41% of all existing schemes. There would also be an impact on future development, with an estimated 9,270 units in the pipeline not being developed. That represents 80% of the total existing development pipeline and includes more than 8,000 specialist homes for older people and people with disabilities which were announced in last year's comprehensive spending review.

The cap undermines several pieces of legislation introduced by the last Government. The introduction of specified accommodation in 2014 establishes a precedent of treating supported housing differently from other forms of social housing. In addition to being eligible for higher rates of housing benefit, specified accommodation has been removed from the current universal credit arrangements, and it is also exempt from the benefit cap. Failure to recognise this unique status when applying the cap is not only inconsistent with previous policy, but it also places at severe risk the step Government have already taken to protect housing for the most disadvantaged. It also threatens one of the Government's own flagship policies, the transforming care programme, which relies on supported accommodation being available in the community.

In 2014 a rental agreement was approved by the Homes and Communities Agency that allowed registered social landlords to increase their rents by inflation plus 1% annually for the next 10 years. The purpose of the agreement was to provide RSLs with a stable base from

[Peter Aldous]

which to invest in their services, including the provision of new supported housing. By capping social rents, the Government have removed this stability, making it virtually impossible for providers of supported housing to plan future developments. For those who have already invested in new schemes, the cap will also jeopardise their ability to meet the existing financial returns of current investments.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful and learned speech. People often get things wrong in debates on housing benefit. I have completed many Government documents to set up new housing schemes specifically for victims of domestic violence. The Government have signed off on funding for such projects based on the current housing benefit rates, and they are now putting their own work in jeopardy.

Peter Aldous: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that intervention, which provides a clear illustration of the point that I am making.

Inside Housing's snap survey found that 95% of supported housing providers will be forced to wind up some or all of their schemes. HB Villages wants to invest in new developments. It requires no public grant, but the investment can only be made if returns from future rents are protected through continued rent exemption. I fully appreciate that Lord Freud's review must be comprehensive and based on as much evidence as possible. It will also be important not to rush it, if we are to arrive at a sustainable long-term funding solution. However, an early assurance from the Government—perhaps from the Minister tonight—that the cap will not apply to supported housing will remove the uncertainty that currently hangs over the sector.

In framing their proposals for the funding of supported housing, it is vital that the Government have in mind the needs of those charities, housing associations and social investors already active and doing great work in the sector as well as those looking to get involved. There is an enormous amount of goodwill and capital waiting in the wings. If the right framework is put in place, those organisations, charities and investors will step up to the plate and carry out projects. In doing so, they will bring significant benefits to the lives of many.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that women's refuge accommodation in Scotland is often owned by local authorities or housing associations? Scottish Women's Aid estimates that a one-bedroom flat in a city such as Glasgow would incur a £7,100 a year loss. Does he agree that if the policy on the cap is not changed, those services will become unsustainable?

Peter Aldous: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. This evening's interventions started off with an East Anglian flavour, but they have now widened to cover the whole country. This is very much a national crisis. Going back to East Anglia, however, a housing association active in Suffolk has emphasised to me the importance of a long-term plan. It says that it cannot run a business with a 10-year outlook on the back of local authority annual discretionary housing payments.

An organisation I would like briefly to mention is Emmaus. It was set up in the UK 25 years ago just outside Cambridge by Selwyn Image. It now has 28 communities across the UK supporting more than 700 vulnerable people, with the objective of increasing that figure to 1,000 by 2020. It needs the seedcorn of a stable funding regime in order to set up new communities such as All Hallows at Ditchingham, which is near Bungay in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) but which also serves my constituency and several others in the surrounding area. Ultimately, with the right initial support, Emmaus communities are self-funding. Research shows that the social return on investment in its communities, using the Treasury's recommended discount rate of 3.5%, is £11 for every £1 invested. In addition, the present value of savings to the state is nearly £6 million per annum for a contribution of just over £2.7 million in housing benefit.

Providing the right long-term investment framework will also encourage the provision in new developments of adaptive technologies, which not only enhance residents' lives but can also produce significant cost savings for local commissioning councils, releasing funds for investment elsewhere. Research by HB Villages shows that the introduction of adaptive technologies can produce savings of between £3 million and £7.8 million—7% to 20% of budget—in a typical council.

In conclusion, I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and hope that he will answer the following questions. How is the evidence review going? When will the results be available? Are the wide range of interested parties in the sector being consulted? What is the impact of the roll out of universal credit? Will he give early confirmation tonight that the threat of the crude local housing allowance cap will be removed after next April? In putting in place the new framework for the future funding of supported housing I urge the Government to be sympathetic and visionary and to think strategically. It is important for the futures of so many vulnerable people that the Government pursue such a course.

6.36 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to be able to contribute to this important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) not only on his well-judged and sensible remarks, but on his commitment to the issue, as well as hon. and right hon. Members from across the House. When we discussed this matter in March, the Minister was receptive.

It would also be remiss of me not to record my delight at the result of my party's leadership process. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), our new party leader and, from tomorrow, Prime Minister, has made a specific and strong commitment to housing, making it perhaps the No. 1 issue in our country. That is important.

I welcome the Government's decision to undertake a detailed strategic review of supported and specialist housing in response to a groundswell of concern not only from registered providers across the country, but from constituency Members of Parliament. I want to make a few general comments—I do not have the same command of the facts and figures as my hon. Friend the

Member for Waveney—and to talk about the impact on my constituency and the surrounding area. I am extremely grateful to Alan Lewin, the chief executive of Axiom Housing Association, who has provided me with a strong briefing.

A year ago, I attended a social event at No. 11 Downing Street—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) is impressed. I do occasionally cross the threshold of some esteemed addresses in this country and I may do so again in the future, under the new dispensation—who knows? I am touched by the hon. Lady's solicitude. On that occasion, I said to the Chancellor that the problems of supported and specialist housing, acute hospital care, adult social care and the interface with local government cannot be solved through salami-slicing or incremental policies. We need a long-term strategic vision of how to address the massive demographic changes that have led to many additional older people needing to be housed.

The Minister is somewhat caught here, because the matter is not really the responsibility of the Department for Communities and Local Government; this is very much a Treasury-driven initiative. He cannot say that, but I can, as a humble Back Bencher. Unfortunately, his Department is caught between Scylla and Charybdis in that it has to continue to develop policy even though long-term thinking has not yet been put in place. The House must be aware that this issue is probably the most important that we face, because we cannot beat the demographic clock. As my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney said, we are undermining our own policies to a certain extent—the policy of oversight from local government of adult social care, health and the transforming care programme.

We certainly need extra time to put a new funding formula in place, but this must not be done on a spatchcock basis. We must think about predicting demographic change and helping local housing associations to deal with that. This is about supported housing for not only older people, but some of the most vulnerable in our society, such as those with special educational needs—

Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) for securing this debate. I just want to say something briefly about supported housing for vulnerable people, which is exactly what my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) is talking about. This is not just about the country, so I want to bring London back into the equation. If we build these things only out of London, people have to leave their local communities. If we want to keep people within the family environment, it is important that we are able to build these expensive properties in London. The only other point I wish to make is that at the moment we can build them by using section 106 agreements, but if buildings are to become starter homes or will have to be sold off, there will be even less opportunity for councils to provide such housing. I urge the Minister to consider supported housing and this type of accommodation when thinking about what other options are available.

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend goes to the nub of the issue. We are not talking about fiscal changes regarding general needs housing, which is a separate issue.

We understand that there has been a significant increase in the housing benefit bill over the past number of years and we have to reduce that. We are talking here about young people who are fleeing violent backgrounds, women who are fleeing violent partners, and teenagers, children and young adults who have mental health issues—my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney alluded to this point. That situation is different, so the Minister needs to put a case to the Treasury that a much more long-term and sustainable funding regime should be put in place before we go any further.

I mentioned delayed discharge. If only we were in a position to plan these supported housing schemes properly—they are now under threat, as my hon. Friend so eloquently revealed—we would make a net saving. The process might take five or 10 years, but we must consider the number of older people who are admitted to hospital when they do not need to be in acute hospital beds, but instead need appropriate housing to deal with their specific individual needs.

Mr Robin Walker: Does my hon. Friend agree that many elderly people and those with specific conditions might be able to avoid a hospital admission altogether if they had the right supported housing?

Mr Jackson: Absolutely. One of the great pleasures of being a constituency MP is that we get to visit some of these excellent supported housing schemes—these extra care centres—with Friary Court and the Pavilions being two that Axiom Housing Association has in the urban area of Peterborough.

May I allude briefly to the specific concerns that Mr Lewin raised about the impact of these changes in the Peterborough area? He said:

“Axiom has already felt one of the consequences of the proposed LHA policy—a flagship extra care scheme for 60 vulnerable people at Whittlesey is now on hold as we cannot commit to building these new projects when there is uncertainty surrounding the future revenue funding streams.”

Whittlesey is actually in North East Cambridgeshire, but the point is very reasonable. The policy has a particular impact when low-value land is involved, as is the case in our neighbouring authority of Fenland, although that also applies to other parts of the east of England.

Mr Lewin also mentions the services that are affected, which include young persons' foyers, homeless hostels, specialist supported housing, extra care housing and sheltered housing. He goes on to detail the

“current impact on each of these schemes/projects based on current rents and service charges”.

For instance, the Peterborough Foyer and the Wisbech Foyer, which do a really good job for young people who want to get off benefits, find work, training or internships, and make something of their lives and improve themselves, will face a cumulative loss in annual income of £620,557. He said that our homeless hostels, such as Fairview Court and New Haven, would lose £461,735. The three Peterborough extra care schemes, two of which I have mentioned, will lose £794,704.

Part of the problem is that we do not get a generic service with such specialist housing. We have night porter services for safety and security, which is an enhanced service that has to be paid for. Losses will also vary according to the amount of Supporting People

[Mr Jackson]

money that funds support costs. When there is little such money, the costs are included in the housing benefit element of the service charge, which will now be capped. Mr Lewin goes on to say that the projected lost revenue to Axiom for supported housing is £2.2 million.

Unless the Government have quite an innovative, forward-looking and visionary approach for how else that money can be made up, many of the registered providers that provide this much-needed housing for vulnerable people will find themselves in great difficulty, and that will clearly impact on work in the community and in general needs housing. A local housing association in my constituency, Cross Keys Homes, runs an apprenticeship school, which is a fantastic scheme. There will be a knock-on effect—a cumulative knock-on effect across the country—in terms of how individuals will have to be taken care of if they cannot be housed in the most appropriate way.

Alison Thewliss: The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech and I agree with much of what he is saying. Does he agree that if people cannot access services such as Blue Triangle and the ARCH resettlement service in my constituency, they would be out on the streets and in very unsafe situations, because there are literally no other housing providers that will take them?

Mr Jackson: Absolutely. The hon. Lady makes a very good point. There will be consequences if we do not step back.

I did not refer to the new Prime Minister because I want a job, as that is highly unlikely to happen. After 11 years, I am resigned to being a humble spear carrier in the drama of British politics—there has been a lot of drama this week. I did so because a new Government will have new priorities, a new vision and new principles. Housing is massively important, especially general needs housing. I am talking about housing our most vulnerable people, looking after them and getting them off the streets. In many respects, I am inordinately proud of what this Government have done on housing, but I am making my remarks because I do not want them to throw that record away through a short-term action of cutting £100 million here or there and therefore making the situation worse down the line.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney for securing this debate. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for raising this issue previously. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that he will talk to his colleagues in the Treasury and other Departments and that he will come back to us, once the review has concluded in an expeditious fashion in the next few months, so that we can tell our constituents and housing associations that the Government are taking housing seriously and looking after the needs of the most vulnerable people in society. We are compassionate Conservatives, and that should be our watchword.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing this important debate. From

his speech it was obvious that he has significant knowledge of the subject, and in my speech I will do my best to respond to his comments. It is obvious from other interventions and the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) that a considerable number of Members across this House also have significant knowledge of and passion for this important subject. I am particularly pleased to be responding to this debate because we are at a crucial point in our important journey to review and reform the funding of supported housing.

Supported housing plays a crucial role in supporting hundreds of thousands of the most vulnerable people in the country. A safe, stable and supportive place to live can be the key to unlocking better outcomes for individuals. For many, it is a stepping-stone to independent living in the longer term, as several colleagues mentioned. One of this Government's key commitments is to protect the most vulnerable. The provision of supported housing underpins that commitment and helps Departments across Whitehall fulfil their objectives in supporting those most in need and delivering on this promise.

As has rightly been said, the sector supports people across the country, from those with mental health conditions to rough sleepers, people who are homeless, ex-offenders and those escaping domestic violence. It ensures that vulnerable elderly people can maintain their independence for as long as possible and live in safety and security, that those with learning difficulties can live as independently as possible, and that care leavers can safely make the transition to self-reliance. The importance of supported housing cannot be overestimated. Supported housing helps people meet the demands of daily life, it helps people get their lives in order, it improves and supports their health and well-being, and it provides a place of safety and stability where people can achieve independence and reach their full potential.

Grahame M. Morris *rose*—

Mr Jones: I understand that the hon. Gentleman wants to intervene, but I will heed Mr Speaker's comments earlier in the debate.

While looking after the most vulnerable in society, we must also ensure that funding for supported housing is efficient, workable, transparent and sustainable, so that it delivers a secure, quality service that provides for those who need it and makes the best use of the money available. Long-term reform of the sector is overdue. Working with and listening to commissioners and providers to date has been invaluable in helping us to envisage what the future might look like, and I see a very positive future where high quality supported housing is there to provide the right support at the right time and for the right length of time, helping those who can move on into work and independence. Services must be outcomes-focused, accountable, planned and responsive to individual and local needs. Our new funding regime must support these goals. The decisions that we make now will lay the foundations for that future.

The roll-out of universal credit provides an opportunity to drive that reform as housing benefit is phased out. Reform of the sector and a new funding regime must be in place for when universal credit is fully rolled out. We think that better services for vulnerable people and value for money go hand in hand. Our reforms must

drive both. We want the quality of services and a focus on outcomes for the people who use them to be at the forefront. We must consider new approaches to transparency and oversight in order to achieve this.

Let me therefore set out what I believe must be the principles for a new long-term funding regime. It must protect the public finances—for the taxpayer, as well as for central and local government. It must also build in a rigorous approach to value for money. At the same time, to protect vulnerable and older people, now and in the future, it must be funded in a way that recognises the increased cost of supporting people in the community, as colleagues on both sides of the Chamber have mentioned.

I also want to ensure that a future funding model provides enough certainty to allow the development of new supported housing units. In particular, an ageing population demands that services and supply keep pace with our social care needs.

Welfare spending cannot be left to spiral out of control. It is also right that people seeking help with their housing costs should not get higher levels of housing benefit for the same property if it is in the social rather than the private rented sector.

However, it is clear that supported housing is different and should be treated differently. The Government recognise the higher costs associated with providing supported housing for vulnerable groups, over and above the costs of general-needs housing. That is why it is crucial, as my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough said, that we work across Government and alongside the sector and other partners to find a workable and sustainable solution.

There has rightly been great interest in this important issue. We have said all along that we wish to hear from a wide spectrum of stakeholders and other partners to ensure that we reflect the diversity of vulnerable people's needs and the support offer across all the different parts of the sector. I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney, who asked about our engagement with the sector, that we constantly engage with it over this important issue, and we have been doing so for some months, because the sector is absolutely part of coming up with a sustainable solution. Having spoken to the sector, I think it recognises that the status quo is not an option, and it is making strong representations, which we are certainly listening to.

As I say, we have been listening to, and working with, providers, umbrella bodies such as the National Housing Federation and the Local Government Association,

and local authorities and other local commissioners, as well as those who represent people in need who rely on, and benefit from, supported housing.

Of course, in Scotland and Wales housing is a devolved matter, and UK Government officials have been speaking to their counterparts in the devolved Administrations. That dialogue has been crucial to guiding our thinking on this important issue, and we need to keep talking as we firm up our plans.

I take the opportunity to thank sector bodies and representatives, such as the National Housing Federation, for the extensive engagement and work they have undertaken to consider what the future regime might look like. It is important that we consider all their proposals in detail, continue the conversation we have begun with the sector and other partners, and hear all voices across this diverse sector.

It is clear that supported housing is an investment that brings significant savings to other parts of the public sector, particularly the NHS. At the same time, any loss of provision risks significant disruption to service users, as well as expensive cost-shunting. That is, why earlier this year, we listened carefully to the sector and put in place the one-year exemption. That short-term exemption was welcomed by the sector, but we recognise that it is only a temporary fix, which is why we are looking at a longer-term solution. That solution must work for all parts of the sector. We must make sure that we recognise the diversity in the sector, and we will continue to do that.

I will certainly take into account the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney and colleagues across the Chamber, have made. We look forward to bringing forward a solution to this important issue as soon as is practical.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Jones *indicated dissent.*

Mr Brown: I am sorry—has the Minister sat down? Is he not giving way? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: The Minister says that he has concluded his speech.

Question put and agreed to.

7 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 12 July 2016

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

Early Years Development and School-Readiness

9.30 am

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Before James Berry moves the motion, I just want to indicate that quite a number of Members wish to contribute to the debate, which will last for only an hour and a half. Of course, the Front-Bench spokesmen and the Minister will need to make their contributions, so we are looking for brevity if we are to get everybody in.

9.31 am

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered children's early years development and school readiness.

As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for selecting this motion, which had cross-party support, for debate. I also thank Save the Children, for which I am a parliamentary champion, and the Sutton Trust and London Councils for their help in preparation for the debate.

I would like to record my profound sadness at the death of Jo Cox, who was one of the signatories to the application for this debate. The subject meant a lot to her and she would have made a very valuable contribution were she here with us.

It is a real privilege to speak on this subject given my family background. Both my parents were teachers who dedicated their lives to improving children's life chances, and they were firmly of the view that, of all the interventions available to the state, investment in education was the best tool for promoting social mobility. It is fair to say that since my parents finished their teaching careers, a significant body of evidence has developed that suggests that the best and ripest time for interventions that have an impact on a child's life chances is in not secondary school or even primary school, but in the early years.

I was delighted to stand last May on a platform that included a commitment to invest in the early years, including by doubling the availability of free childcare for three and four-year-olds from 15 to 30 hours. Indeed, the Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) launched that policy at Advantage Day Nursery in Tolworth in my constituency. As they were completing a puzzle with some four-year-old children, one child looked at the Prime Minister and said, "David, why are all those people taking photographs of us?" The Prime Minister's response was, "If we finish this puzzle, they might just go away." Well, the puzzle was duly completed, the election was won and this House has now delivered on the Government's commitment to 30 hours of free childcare, which will be rolled out next year.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about the need for a specific focus, and I entirely agree with that. The Welsh Labour Government focus on the years from pregnancy to the age of seven by looking at every single agency that is involved in a child's life during that time. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that sort of holistic approach is necessary?

James Berry: That sounds like an interesting approach. In January, the Prime Minister launched the life chances strategy, which looks at the whole process from birth onwards, and there are the childcare offers for two-year-olds and for three and four-year-olds, but the holistic approach sounds like a sensible way forward.

The purpose of today's debate is to ensure that the opportunity provided by the Government's significant investment is grasped with both hands so that children's life chances really are improved. I will make three key points, which are about the importance of children's early years to their development; the lasting impact of poor early years input; and how the Government can make the best of this opportunity to promote social mobility.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about the importance of the early years. Does he agree that one of the best starts in life is to grow up in a strong, stable family, whatever the make-up of that family? In such a family, a child can enjoy secure relationships, which they can then develop in school with teachers and with other pupils. That gives them a firm ground on which to proceed in their educational life.

James Berry: I understand that research shows that growing up in a strong and stable family is important for life chances. Not everyone is able to grow up in a strong, stable family, but the presence of one or two good parents—and, where that is not possible, the presence of good early years education—can make a real difference to a child's life chances.

Recent data have shown just how important a child's early years are to their development. The National Academy of Sciences in the United States found that:

"Virtually every aspect of...human development, from the brain's evolving circuitry to the child's capacity for empathy, is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning...in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years."

Evidence has demonstrated that the rapid development of the brain in the first few years of a child's life provides the foundation for future health, wellbeing and attainment. Without stimulating environments and experiences in those early years, children will fail to develop the skills that they need, particularly language skills, in the same way as their peers. The extent to which a child's life chances are fixed in the first two to four years is truly astonishing, particularly in the field of communication skills, which provide the foundation for vocabulary development and the understanding of language. They are a springboard to the literary skills needed to get through school.

A responsive adult caregiver can minimise the effects of significant stresses on a child's development, such as growing up in poverty. That echoes the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona

[James Berry]

Bruce). Supportive parenting is recognised as an important protective factor against long-term disadvantage, as is professional early years input. Much could be said about parenting and the need for the state to consider supporting good parenting strategies, which the Prime Minister focused on in his January speech on life chances. However, for the purposes of this debate, I will focus mainly on the pre-school setting and the lasting impact of a poor early years experience.

Statistics show that one in three children in England start primary school without meeting the Government's recommended level for early development. That figure is even higher among children from poorer backgrounds and among boys. In my borough of Kingston upon Thames, 87% of children reach the expected level of speech and language skills at the age of five, partly due to the demographic and partly due to the excellent early years opportunities in Kingston. The national average is 67%, but just 50% of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds reach the expected standards at the age of five. That is worrying in itself, but it is even more worrying for three reasons.

First, children from poorer backgrounds are less likely to get the necessary help at home to get them school-ready. A study in Kansas in the United States has shown that by the time children of professional parents enter kindergarten, they have heard 19 million more words than children of working-class parents, and a staggering 32 million more words than children of parents on welfare. Secondly, the school-readiness gap between the richest and poorest five-year-olds is as big as 19 months, which is nearly two academic years. Thirdly, research shows clearly that children who start behind at primary school stay behind at primary school, and go on to stay behind at secondary school and in post-school academic and work opportunities.

Save the Children's fantastic "Read on. Get on." campaign, which a number of hon. Members here support, found that one in four children who did not meet the expected levels of speech and communication skills at the age of five failed to reach the expected reading levels at key stages 1 and 2. It also found that one in four of those children failed to meet the expected level in English at the age of 11. The findings go further than that, as they do not just apply to English but correlate with the development of ability in maths at the age of 11.

The Sutton Trust has demonstrated that the gap in early years development is directly correlated with later educational outcomes and, as a consequence, later life outcomes. Its paper "Subject to Background" shows that disadvantaged students are significantly more likely to do A-levels if they have attended any pre-school, and particularly if they have attended a pre-school offering high-quality early years education.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that the early years point to later development. My local nursery in Torfaen—Abersychan Brynteg, which my daughter attends, incidentally—recently had an excellent Estyn inspection, achieved through innovative teaching and strong leadership by the headteacher. Does he agree that it is vital to have that in the early years?

James Berry: I agree entirely. Having visited a number of daycare nurseries in my constituency, as I am sure other hon. Members will have done in theirs, I have seen that well led operations are always the most successful, particularly when they are led by professional early years practitioners.

Children who start behind stay behind, and vice versa. Given that children who start and stay behind are more likely to come from families in socioeconomically deprived areas, a cycle of disadvantage is created. That cycle can be broken by improved guidance and support for parents and improved early years offers to ensure that when children arrive for their first day of primary school, they are ready to learn, whatever the circumstances into which they were born.

Finally, on how the Government can make the best of this opportunity, it is important to start by recognising what they have done. They have committed to investing nearly £3 billion a year in the early years, the greatest sum ever, to boost the availability and quality of the early years offer. There are a number of ways in which they can ensure that that massive investment has maximal impact on boosting social mobility. Those who speak later in the debate will no doubt add their own suggestions, but I have four.

The first involves the workforce. In Kingston, as in the rest of the UK, there are some excellent early years educators. Some are qualified early years teachers and others are not, but the workforce is bound to increase significantly when the additional offer of 15 hours a week comes into force next year. It is encouraging that the Government plan to deliver an early years workforce strategy; that offers welcome recognition of the important role of that workforce in a child's early development. Unsurprisingly, international studies have found that good-quality, graduate-led childcare secures the best early years outcomes, but the evidence also shows that good-quality early education disproportionately benefits boys and children from disadvantaged backgrounds—the very groups currently being left behind—not only in the short term but right through primary and secondary school. Equally, the evidence shows that low-quality childcare has no benefit, or even a negative impact on a child's development.

Early years educators and staff with equivalent qualifications can play a critical role in creating high-quality learning environments in a nursery, providing leadership and increasing the skills of other staff. What assurances can the Minister give the House that the early years workforce strategy will include plans to attract and retain enough bright staff for us to achieve the ambition of an early years teacher in every nursery setting?

My second suggestion is to increase the availability of speech and language therapy services. I was recently fortunate enough to meet the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and to see the speech and language therapy services provided by Your Healthcare in Surbiton, in my constituency. From those briefings, it is clear to me that access to high-quality SLT is vital to ensure that parents and early years staff are trained in the right strategies to optimise a child's verbal communication development, and to enable early identification and specialist intervention when a child shows signs of a speech and language deficit.

Nevertheless, as the 2008 report by Mr Speaker—the Bercow report—showed, the availability of quality SLT services for nought to 19-year-olds is patchy across the country, and greater consistency is required. It is not possible, or indeed desirable, to have a full-time speech and language therapist in every single nursery, but high-quality SLT input into the curriculum and SLT-facilitated training for all staff in early years settings would be a big step forward. I hope that Kingston Council will consider funding such a programme locally, and that other local authorities will do the same nationwide.

My third suggestion is that we do not ignore the additional requirements of children with special educational needs or disability—a subject close to my heart, as my mother was a special needs co-ordinator. In London, 0.8% of children benefiting from early education have an education, health and care plan, the highest percentage in the country. The cost of providing childcare for children with special educational needs or a disability, whether or not they have a formal plan, is higher than for children without special needs. Under the current Government proposals, it is not entirely clear whether providers delivering the additional 15 hours for EHCP or SEND children will receive additional funding to meet those children's needs. I would be grateful for the Minister's clarification.

Finally, on take-up, the Government have introduced a number of early years schemes since 2010. Research by the Sutton Trust and the National Audit Office shows that although take-up for early years offers has generally been good, it has been poorer among the most disadvantaged families. From 2010 to 2015, uptake of the 15 hours of free childcare was 98% in the least deprived areas, but only 90% in the most deprived areas. The figures for the offer for two-year-olds are more stark. Against a departmental aspiration of 73% to 77% take-up, only 58% of parents of disadvantaged two-year-olds have taken up the offer. I appreciate that there may be more up-to-date figures, but those were the figures available to me. The very children who need such interventions, for which the Government are making funding available, are the least likely to receive them.

I know that the Department for Education advertises its early years offers, but the advertising campaign appears to be missing some of its core target audience. Given the disparity in uptake, it seems to me that a better solution would be to mandate the provision of a user-friendly information sheet to all new parents. One fixed point of parental interaction with the state might be when parents register their child's birth; they could then be provided with the crucial information about what is on offer to help their children.

In his January speech on life chances, our Prime Minister recognised that the early years present a window of opportunity, saying:

“Destinies can be altered for good or ill in this window of opportunity.”

In the early years, parents can make a huge difference to their children's life chances, as can the state through early years education. We have seen how high-quality early education can transform children's future, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. If we want to achieve social justice and promote social aspiration, we must ensure that the Government's welcome investment in the early years makes the best possible impact in that

short window of opportunity. I look forward to hearing hon. Members' contributions about how best to achieve that, and the Minister's remarks on how he will ensure that it is achieved.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. To give further guidance on the interpretation of “brevity”, it will mean three and a half to four minutes; then I think we will get everybody in.

9.48 am

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): It is, as ever, a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) for securing this important debate, and for his thoughtful opening remarks. I would particularly like to associate myself with his remarks about our dear friend, the late Jo Cox. We remember her fondly today.

I will be brief. I want to talk about poverty and its impact on children's early years development and readiness for school. I recently produced a report on child poverty in my constituency, which showed that one in five children live in poverty. By any metric, that is a deeply concerning statistic. A childhood that is safe, supportive, warm and healthy, with the prospect of a bright future ahead, should be the right of every child, not just a luxury for some. It is important because how people start their life heavily determines what the rest of their life will be like. For those born into poverty, it is hard to climb out of it.

We know that poverty has a negative impact on children's development in their earliest years. Figures from Save the Children, which does incredibly important work on early years development, show that in my constituency last year more than 200 children fell behind before they had even started school. Nationally, one in three children in England start school without meeting the Government-recommended level for early development. That should shame us all and ensure that we redouble our efforts to stop children falling behind.

A lot of good work is being done to stop children falling behind. In particular, I draw attention to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who has been a champion of early intervention for many years and was heavily involved in the cross-party manifesto “The 1001 Critical Days”, which contains a number of sensible policy suggestions. The Early Intervention Foundation is also leading the way on this issue by championing early intervention and, crucially, evaluating the evidence to find out what works.

Stopping children falling behind in their earliest years will require the Government to be bolder in their approach to tackling the root causes of child poverty and of children falling behind. I had hoped that a step towards that bolder approach would be delivered in the life chances strategy, which we were told would be forthcoming after the EU referendum. I was disappointed to learn that the announcement of the strategy has now been pushed back. I urge the Government to bring it forward at the earliest opportunity.

[Dan Jarvis]

I make the case to the Minister that the possibility of new leadership at the top of the Government offers fresh opportunities to look again at these issues. There is no doubt that some of the Government's measures over the past six years have contributed to children in my constituency remaining in or falling into poverty. There is now an opportunity to change that, so I urge the Government's new leadership to be ambitious.

I am bringing forward a private Member's Bill that will seek to legislate for a target to reduce child poverty and to introduce steps to measure how well the Government are performing in achieving that target. I would be happy to work with the Minister and the Government on the Bill, and urge them to consider the idea seriously. We can end the scandal that is child poverty only by everyone in this place working together, with national and local government working across society. I hope this important debate can be a step towards that goal.

9.52 am

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) for securing this debate.

I would like to take the debate in a slightly different direction. I was a school governor for a long while before I came into this place, covering early years and senior years, and I have four children. I am concerned about, and want us to bear down on, the fact that the problem is not diminishing; school resilience, early years development and school-readiness are increasing problems throughout all parts of society. While I am talking, the Minister should keep in mind the fact that mine is a large, rural constituency. There are enormous problems with delivering in rural environments as opposed to metropolitan ones, such as the relevant organisations not having enough staff.

I shall concentrate first on the fact that school-readiness is not a "one hit"; it has to be started from the beginning. Early years teachers in the readiness setting cannot do it in that final year, with four-year-olds. It has to start earlier. We know what the problems are: they were largely indicated in the NSPCC report; the important research on speech and language therapy that was carried out for the Scottish Parliament in 2014; Speaker Bercow's report in 2008; and the work done by Save the Children and Newcastle University in 2013. But what about the solutions?

Speech and language enable our children to communicate. If they cannot communicate, they are disadvantaged—end of. In Suffolk, we have a paucity of speech and language therapists. That is probably because the demand on the system is rising. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, we need to address that problem.

We teach our children through nursery rhymes and repetition. We now have less talk in our daily lives and more use of mobile devices and so on. Our children face away from us when we are pushing them in prams. From their earliest start, children need to look at an adult's face to see our facial expressions. Not one Member present will not have laughed at a baby taking a little bit of lemon in its mouth and looking as if it has been given something dreadful to taste. These things help our children to learn and are incredibly important.

The way we ask our children to do things is important. If someone says, "Cake?" to a child, they can say yes or no. If someone says, "Does Emily want a piece of cake?", that gives the child the ability to interact and develop language. A child who has had the benefit of good language skills before they go to school is not only not 18 months behind—those months are impossible to make up—but will accelerate through school.

Children learn to listen when we talk. As we know in this place, the ability to listen can be very useful throughout life. Children must learn resilience. It is hugely important that they are allowed to fail. The rise in mental health issues later in children's lives shows that teaching them resilience—letting them understand that they can fail in a situation and that that is not wrong—helps them.

We do not do enough to develop personal skills. Children must be allowed to put on their own coats. One in four children arrive at school in nappies. It is absolutely criminal that teachers have to try to teach while spending their time getting children dry, and that is particularly difficult if there are few classroom assistants. I had four kids under five. Mine all got dry by 18 months, because it is ruddy expensive to leave them in nappies. There is no excuse. It was felt discriminatory to insist children were dry, but it is not. We should be providing environments that help parents to understand. Parenting support is one thing that I ask for.

Outdoor play is also important. Children climb and improve their muscle tension. A lot of children arrive at school unable to hold a chubby crayon because they have held iPads and other such things. Children need to play and to explore. We need to build that into their routine.

I urge the Minister to think of rural areas and not treat them the same as towns, particularly in relation to workforce planning. We parents buy our childcare for the hours that suit us. That might not work with the business model of nurseries and the early years provision that enables school readiness. As the Bercow report and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton said, we need to improve speech and learning support. We need to consider parenting classes to encourage supportive families around our children, to ensure that children do not fail in the system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. Speeches should now be kept to around three minutes.

9.57 am

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) for securing this debate on such an important subject.

In these times of national turmoil, as the UK looks to redefine its status in the world and concerns about our economy loom large, it has never been more important for us to fulfil the potential of all our citizens. It has never been more important to ensure that we give our children every educational advantage available. We need each and every one to be equipped to play their part.

The previous Labour Government understood that education is the foundation for all: "Education, education, education". In that context, there is a lot of talk of

GCSEs and A* to C grades, and, as a former secondary school teacher, parent, school governor and nursery school governor, I know that they are extremely important.

In my constituency, which is fast becoming a hub for advanced manufacturing and is developing as a centre of prosperity, there is much talk of improving educational standards. It is vital that we all recognise the starting point. The launch pad for our children is not in secondary school, when they are aged 11, and nor is it in primary school. It is in those very important pre-school early years that the foundations for success are laid.

Consider the fact that the total size of the human brain is 95% of its maximum size by the age of six. That is really important. It is true that cortical and subcortical components of the brain change dramatically during childhood and adolescence, but the fact remains that 95% of human brain function is developed by the age of six, so what happens in the early years is incredibly important for the individual's future wellbeing and economic success.

Of course, the earliest education for the child begins in the home. When that is compromised in deprived communities, when that is limited because parents and carers have themselves been deprived of education, opportunities and extended experience, when that is curtailed because every ounce of the parents' energy is expended on grinding out an impoverished existence, the child is deprived of crucial learning opportunities and so often disadvantaged from the outset.

It is especially for those reasons that the state must concentrate on providing quality early years education. The experiences of a child in their early years are critical for their future, encouraging the drivers of learning, curiosity and imagination, as well as critical learning behaviours. Self-regulation, resilience and empathy are key to a child having positive early learning experiences.

Indeed, there is a growing body of understanding that demonstrates that these early behaviours have a significant impact on life chances and employment prospects. Recent research has clearly shown that children who have access to quality nursery school education go on to high levels of school achievement, have positive attitudes and achieve higher test scores. They are less likely to need remedial or special education; they are more likely to go on to further and higher education; and they are more likely to have stable employment. They have a significantly lower incidence of involvement in criminal activity, are less likely to need access to social services and are less likely to engage in substance abuse.

Therefore, it is clear that if we genuinely want to effect change in our country, we should begin in these early years. Only yesterday, I was speaking to a nursery school teacher in Tower Hamlets—I will have to leave her comments for another time, as my time this morning is limited. I will just say that I am extremely concerned that we are confusing childcare with quality nursery school education and I am worried to hear from nursery school headteachers that recent cuts in budgets for nursery schools mean that it is difficult for them to keep quality and qualified nursery staff in their schools. It is admirable that the Government want to increase free childcare to 30 hours, but that must not be confused with quality education. The Government know the difference and should invest accordingly, because while childcare can educate children, it is not the same as

planned nursery education. For the sake of our children and the prosperity of the country, I ask the Minister to give an assurance that the Government will prioritise investment in early years education.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. To assist with time discipline, the speech time is now going to be displayed on the screens around Westminster Hall.

10.2 am

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on securing this debate. I also declare an interest as a former infant schoolteacher. Indeed, almost exactly six years ago I was just ending my previous career. My first day as an infant school teacher remains the scariest new day in any job I have ever undertaken. Sadly, infant school was not the last time that I have dealt with five-year-olds' behaviour.

I will talk briefly about the Imagination Library, which is a project we have developed in north Lincolnshire and in the east riding of Yorkshire—people may know of it. It is a free book-gifting scheme, which was originally established by Dolly Parton in Tennessee in the United States, and then brought here some years ago. As an infant schoolteacher, I obviously understood the importance of kids reading at home and how much better prepared they were when they turned up at school having actually opened and read a book, and read with their parents or carers. Sadly, for too many of the children I used to teach in Scunthorpe, that was not the case.

When I became an MP, I was fortunate enough to be able to work with North Lincolnshire Council, under the innovative leadership of Baroness Redfern and Councillor Rob Waltham, to establish the Imagination Library scheme in north Lincolnshire. The scheme now delivers books to 87% of all five-year-olds in our borough. Since we started the scheme in 2013, it has already had a significant impact on the results of kids who arrive at school. In 2015, 70% of our five-year-olds in north Lincolnshire were judged to have achieved a good level of development by the time they arrived at school, compared with just 53% in 2013.

This free book-gifting scheme is wholly integrated with the NHS locally and with our children's centres—of course, we have protected and actually expanded some of our children's centres in north Lincolnshire. The scheme is also integrated with our library service—of course, in north Lincolnshire we have actually built new libraries and extended all of our library opening hours to support this scheme, which has had a really transformative effect.

As I said, 87% of all five-year-olds in north Lincolnshire are now registered with the scheme; indeed, in parts of my patch, on the Isle of Axholme, 92% of children are registered. The scheme is open to every child and it is having a really transformative effect. In the other part of my constituency, which is in the east riding of Yorkshire, the council has not funded the scheme, but I myself run and fund a scheme in Goole that has 56 children signed up to it. Getting books out to kids from a very early age to get them reading and learning with their parents gives them the very best start in school.

[Andrew Percy]

I do not have time today to go on too much further, and have just two questions to put to the Minister. First, what assessment has been made of schemes such as the Imagination Library? The Scottish Government provide the Imagination Library to all looked-after children in Scotland and perhaps we could consider doing something similar. Secondly and finally, will he look at the Imagination Library's bid to the Department for Education's children's social care innovation programme, which will mean more of these books being distributed to more children nationally?

10.5 am

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I will focus on early intervention and school-readiness. In 2013, Home Start UK, working with the Department for Education, undertook a pilot programme over a two-year period called "Big Hopes, Big Futures". The report that emerged from the pilot showed that, in 2014, there was a 19% gap in achieving a "good level of development" between children on free school meals and their classmates. Action for Children's most recent report shows that, in the past two years, there has been improvement but by only 1%. Ofsted's assessment in 2015 was that the gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers, in terms of early years development and school-readiness, was not closing.

Why are we not getting results? I had a quick look at some of the Library briefing papers on poverty in the UK and on early intervention from the Library. We have Healthy Child programmes, Healthy Start and Public Health England's seven national priorities, and we are getting support from health visitors and family-nurse partnerships, so why are we not getting the improvements that all of us wish to see?

We can make a difference, but solely increasing free childcare hours should not be seen as a panacea. Families supported by the "Big Hopes, Big Futures" programme saw an improvement of between 25% and 33% in their children's school-readiness for language, cognition, behavioural adjustment, daily living skills and family support. Not only did that programme directly affect the children, but it helped the parents in many ways, from improving their physical and mental health to improving their skills and knowledge of early years and child development, as well as their work-readiness.

If we know the impact of those schemes, why are two out of every five children in deprived areas lagging behind their classmates on measures of child development? That is true around the country and true in my constituency of Great Grimsby, where 34% of children—more than 400 children—are not reaching a good level of development by the age of five. The answer is not all about academic achievement, because everything from the ability to make friends and form good relationships to understanding feelings form part of what it means to be school-ready.

A study undertaken in 2000 found that socio-emotional and behavioural development help to improve a child's "teachability", and do far more than a traditional simplistic focus on reading, writing and arithmetic would. The "Big Hopes, Big Futures" report cited international studies that demonstrate the "pivotal" importance of family support in the transition from home to school. It

recognised that many families in the "deprived" category have multiple needs, and that helping them requires complex intervention-based solutions. That is why I am surprised and disappointed that a scheme in my constituency that has existed since 1995 to provide exactly those sorts of solutions was first of all wound down to a narrow perinatal pilot scheme and then closed in March this year, owing to a lack of funding.

I know that I only have a little time left—well, not any time at all—but I will extend my speech anyway before I get told off. I will just mention the funding, because there are issues around where pupil premiums are spent and whether they are really making a difference, and around the reductions in and changes to the early intervention grant—that funding was reduced to a figure 20% below the original 2010-11 allocation. It also included a specified amount for education places for disadvantaged two-year-olds, but because it was not ring-fenced by local authorities, that money did not have to be spent in that way. Subsequently, the funding was subsumed into a dedicated schools grant; the payment of the remaining early intervention grants was transferred into the business rates retention scheme; and the remaining £150 million was centralised into the DFE for adoption and reform grants. We need to ensure that that funding gets to the appropriate areas and schemes that can actually help disadvantaged children.

10.9 am

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I wanted to take part in this debate because I strongly endorse the four points with which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) began: the workforce, speech and language therapy, special educational needs and disability—SEND—and what the most disadvantaged need most. He was absolutely right about that last point and, with regard to my own constituency, I am sad to report that Norwich recently turned out to be a cold spot of social mobility according to the social mobility index—the Minister is familiar with that. I am leading local work to investigate the finding, which returns us directly to the fact that we need to focus on the point in the early years when intervention can make the most difference for later years. Evidence on life chances shows a very clear progression when intervention starts as early as possible.

On getting the help to those who need it most, I would like to present a local example of impressive joint working in Norwich between a children's centre, health visitors and a school. It is a tight-knit geographical cluster, but they are taking on the challenge of reaching out to those who most need the help—my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton pointed out that there is a risk that those who need the provision less are the ones who use it. It is no secret to anyone that children's centres need to be able to use their resources in the most effective way, and I thoroughly support that team in Norwich in their efforts to reach out to those parents and families who need the support most.

There is also a clear piece of work that children's centres and infant schools in particular can do together—approaching school-readiness—which takes me on to another theme that has been well-argued already this morning. I concur that school-readiness is crucial. Will the Minister take the opportunities presented by the expansion of the 15 hours' childcare offer to 30 hours

and the associated funding formula changes to review what he expects of school-readiness? I note that in the 2014 “Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage”, school-readiness is rightly laid out but, currently, settings report to local authorities on request. The Minister might like to look at that. He has a puzzled look on his face—it is on page 15 of the statutory early years framework document. I urge him to see what can be done to help childcare and early years settings work with schools, as in the local example I presented.

10.12 am

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): I was pleased to serve on the Childcare Bill Committee last December to try to improve what was, on the face of it, tremendously powerful legislation designed to make a huge difference for our youngest children before school. Sadly, Ministers did not recognise the flaws in their plans, so I tabled a new clause that would have meant they were mandated to ensure that all three and four-year-olds had access to high-quality, flexible and accessible early education and childcare provision, delivered by well-qualified, confident and experienced practitioners and led by an early years graduate. It would also have required Ministers to publish proposals for the development of the early years workforce. At the time, early language attainment was increasing, but the pace of improvement was so slow that it would have taken more than a decade of similar progress to get all children school-ready by the age of five. Figures from Action for Children suggest that one in three children across England still arrives at school not ready to learn. Yes, I recognise that policy changes take time to have an impact, but I have reservations about whether the world of childcare out there is able to deliver what the Government say is needed.

Half of children living in low-income families will arrive at school ill-equipped, as will almost 40% of children who live in our most deprived communities. In the north-east, where my constituency sits, fewer than two thirds of children will have reached a good level of development before starting school at the age of five, which is significantly lower than the 70% in the south-east. However, the gap between the most and the least deprived communities is growing, while the gaps between the north and the south and between boys and girls have not changed in three years. The Government will, I am sure, have the support of every Opposition Member if they can narrow that gap during the current Parliament. We must not settle for the small changes of recent years. Will the Minister therefore deliver a new measure of child development at age five to allow a national picture of child development that incorporates a definition of school-readiness, to remove the uncertainty regarding the outcomes the Government believe early years education should deliver? Will they set ambitious goals to focus on those children whose life chances are being blighted from their earliest years, to close the attainment gap?

High-quality early education—specifically nurseries led by graduate early years teachers—has been shown to have the most significant impact on the early language skills of young children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. But therein lies the cruelty of the current system. Childcare settings in disadvantaged areas are the least likely to be of high quality, which is why I argued during the Childcare Bill Committee for the

Government to have both the power and the responsibility to ensure that all our children are cared for and taught by highly qualified professionals. Instead, we have a situation in which nurseries are unable to pay the wages needed to attract early years teachers because of the chronic underfunding of the free education entitlement from the Government. At the same time, universities are withdrawing their early years teacher courses because they cannot attract the applicants.

I ask the Minister: when will his long-awaited early years workforce strategy appear and will it include an assessment of the level of provision available and likely to be available in the next few months? Finally, what is he doing to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality care we all desire, delivered by high-quality professionals?

10.16 am

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on securing this important debate on the investment of resources, time and effort in very young children so that they get the best start in life and at school. It does start with the family, whatever format that family may have, but it is also important that they get access to pre-school hours and nursery education.

Starting school can be a stressful time for any child, but for a child with special educational needs it can be even harder, and it is on that aspect that I wish to concentrate from a Northern Ireland perspective. Imagine the challenges that every child faces on their first day in the playground—socialising with new children, being in a new environment and coping with separation from parents. Imagine dealing with all that while also dealing with the challenges of an educational disability, such as Down’s syndrome or autism. Such children may make up only a minority of those starting school each year, but we in this House never lose sight of the duty we have to give children with special educational needs the best educational start possible. I am afraid I am not confident that that is happening in the Northern Ireland context.

Earlier this year, the parents of young children with special educational needs were sent letters telling them that the pre-school hours they were entitled to would be cut from four and a half to two and a half. Those plans could only have hurt children’s school-readiness, which is why the leadership forum for special schools came out so strongly against them, particularly on the grounds that they would give nurseries less time to help children overcome severe to extremely challenging behaviour. We have been told that the plans have been put on review and will not be implemented until September 2017. I suggest to the Minister that it might be useful to have some good exchanges with Ministers in the devolved Administrations to pool knowledge and expertise and implement best practice from the devolved regions alongside that which exists in England to ensure that children with educational and behavioural challenges get the best start in life.

Despite that review of the plans, we are still hearing of uncertainty at an individual school level. The Northern Ireland Education Authority has stated that the root cause of the problem is an unprecedented number of

[Ms Margaret Ritchie]

families needing to find places at special needs nurseries. If that is so, it fits with the broader picture that we have heard about today of children being brought up in poverty: children who face poverty are also facing that more difficult challenge. Children's early education and long-term life chances are being held back by a scarcity of accessible nursery places and a lack of action from decision makers.

I am conscious, Mr Evans, that I have gone over my time. The important thing is to find solutions, and that is about investment in resources and pooling knowledge from across the regions.

10.19 am

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. The way in which a child develops in their early years has a huge influence on every aspect of their lives, including their future economic wellbeing, educational attainment and health. More poignantly perhaps, a child's early years development is key to their emotional development and their ability to sustain positive and meaningful relationships. Yet according to the Department for Education's most recent early years foundation stage profile results, one in three children starts school without having achieved the expected level of early development.

To our shame, but perhaps not to our surprise, the likelihood of falling behind is much higher among the poorest children. In my constituency of Rotherham, 38% of children—almost four in 10—are not reaching a good level of development at the age of five. In fact, Rotherham ranks in the bottom 25%. How can four children in every 10 in my constituency be arriving for their first day of school unprepared to learn, socialise and thrive? It is appalling that we have a system where the postcode a child is born into can determine their readiness and preparedness on their first day of school. How can we have failed children to such an extent that their future chances of success have already been determined even before they begin formal education? I find the situation deeply frustrating, because it is something that this House could prevent with the right interventions.

Parents are the first mentors and role models for their children. They have a strong influence on their learning and play a fundamental role in helping their child develop. For a number of reasons, however, some parents simply need a bit of extra guidance on how to positively interact with their child. Through my Dare2Care campaign to prevent child abuse, I know that parents from all backgrounds are calling for support. There seems to be an assumption that people innately know how to be parents and have all the necessary parenting skills and that a parent is inherently skilled and ready to deal with even the most serious issues their child could face, such as sexual or online abuse.

During my roundtables, I heard from parents, charities and academics, and they all asked for support, including well-funded Sure Start centres at the core of every community, providing flexible, trusted parenting support; targeted support for parents who may be struggling to cope or may not be confident in their own abilities; and reviews of every existing point of intervention in a child's development, including using the personal child health record or red book.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I completely agree that parents need much more support to break cycles and give young children much better opportunities and life chances. Does the hon. Lady also agree that in certain areas support is available, but is not promoted or accessible? In my county, there is a lot of support, but the courses are too expensive, the hours are not appropriate and nobody knows about them.

Sarah Champion: I completely agree with that, and it goes back to my original point about the postcode lottery, which cannot be fair. Every child in this country needs the best start.

The Government also need to run awareness campaigns highlighting the tell-tale signs of abuse. Tomorrow evening we may have a new Prime Minister, but can the Minister please tell us whether he still plans to take forward the Government's life chances strategy? Will the strategy include action to provide parents with the support they are asking for to protect children from physical, sexual and online abuse? Will the strategy look at giving parents the tools to enable them to face the challenges their children have to endure? Will he look at every available existing opportunity, from Sure Start centres to health checks to free childcare, and outline how each intervention can be used to support parents? Finally, will he please tell us today whether the Government will use the opportunities created through the strategy to take action in the early years and improve the life chances of all children? The strategy should especially focus on the most disadvantaged children, because every child should have the opportunity to be the fully empowered citizen they deserve to be.

10.23 am

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): We all recognise that the achievement of development goals in the early years is the foundation for a healthy life, whether that is socially, psychologically or economically. Given that, it is all the more important that state agencies and voluntary, community and faith sector schools, in partnership with and in support of families, do their utmost to play their part in ensuring that our children get the best start in life.

In my professional career as a social worker—I started in a day nursery—I never ceased to be amazed by the capacity of children to gain so much from play, social interaction, direction, encouragement and simple kindness. Children's first smile, first wave, first frown, first crawl and first "no" are all part of the development process that brings joy to families. Of course, there are the downsides to child development, such as the sleepless nights, the tantrums, the crying, the sickness, the worries—and that is just the parents.

Notwithstanding the significant amount of research over the years in the whole field of child development, it is clear and self-evident that a loving and caring environment in which to grow is the most important gift that can be given to a child. I am sure that many parents in the room would do things differently in how we brought up our children, and I am no exception to that, but one key aspect for a child is the consistency of the care given to them by their parents or carers. At the other end of the spectrum, it is also important to ensure that parents or carers feel that they have a consistent economic environment in which they can nurture and help their children grow.

It is therefore the responsibility of Government to ensure that the wider economic conditions in which families bring up children are as stable as possible. There also has to be the effective use of policy drivers, which many Members have alluded to.

It is the responsibility of us all to ensure that we have a nation of healthy children who have been given the best start in life, who live in a safe environment and who have good support and social systems there to help them. In particular, for those children who are not fortunate enough to have a stable, loving, caring family, it is all the more important that we do everything we can to ensure that they have as good a chance as possible to develop into mature, socially and personally confident children whose self-esteem is not damaged by their circumstances.

I hope this debate helps to play a part in keeping this very important issue on the agenda. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) for giving us the opportunity to say these few words of support. I also thank such organisations as Action for Children and Save the Children, which remind us of our responsibilities in this crucial area of social policy.

10.27 am

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on securing this debate. I cannot compete with the expertise. A lot of people have done a lot of work in this field already. I am, however, the grandfather of six grandchildren, all of whom are close to me. Two live next door. I spend at least as much time every week playing narrative games with Playmobil as I do making speeches in this place, and to somewhat better effect.

The goal of education—and life, I suppose—is the fulfilment of potential, and fulfilment is far more variable than potential. Crucial to that, as we have all recognised, is a good start. What does that good start look like? I think it can be defined only in broad terms, recognising that not every child does or can develop in precisely the same way. There is a danger in this debate of being far too precise, because a good start is not the same as an accelerated start, and the phenomenon of tiger mums and people fretting about their child's development is a new cultural phenomenon. In our society, we tend to value educational learning, possibly above other factors that other cultures might value, such as emotional resilience or social skills.

Broadly, however, we have a concept of what a happy, developing, normal child is like and what their capabilities should be, and we simply find that some children do not match up to that, and it is fair to call them deprived. They are deprived in a range of senses: sometimes deprived of environmental stimulus and emotional support, and often deprived of parental attention and opportunities for creative play. Those are all forms of deprivation, and such children therefore arrive at school less capable of taking advantage of school and without parents who can teach or encourage them in how to take advantage. School therefore becomes a struggle and life becomes a struggle. We all recognise that; it has been well laid out by other Members in the debate.

Sure Start and many other policy initiatives sought to correct that. There has been a whole pile of initiatives, local and national, and they have varied in reach, impact, resource and effectiveness. I pay tribute to all the researchers

and policy makers. I pay particular tribute to a Member who is not here and who has done an enormous amount of work on this matter in this House: the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen). He has done a tremendous amount to put it on the agenda. Some of the policies, it has to be said, are slightly conflicted. Is childcare primarily about developing the child or about freeing the employment market a little bit?

My central and only point is that key to so much of this is the acquiring and teaching of parental skills. Children spend a lot of time at home—more than they ever will at school—and we cannot just assume that the skills are transmitted and passed on. As a Government, we recognised that fact, but we tinkered rather than addressed it full on. When Sarah Teather was in the chair that the Minister now occupies, some pilots were conducted and the Prime Minister spoke warmly about developing parental skills.

Most of the learning that we engage in during our hard-pressed time in school—learning the pluperfect, trigonometry or how to make a coat hanger, none of which I have had to use—has not done me any good in life. But I have had to be a parent, as will most people. Early learning development is simply not on the school curriculum in the significant way that it ought to be. There is a serious danger that in trying to develop all the policies outlined today we leave parents out of the equation, and we also leave the training of parents as very much a backstop issue rather than something that we ought to put up front as a major policy issue for any Government.

10.30 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I rise to speak in this debate as somebody who has experience of being an English teacher for more than 23 years before I entered this place. As the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) said, there are certainly similarities in the kind of behaviour that we might encounter. I have a particular interest in this debate from that perspective. I do not think I have ever been involved in a debate where there has been such consensus about the need for all children from all backgrounds to receive the best start that we can possibly give them in life, which they deserve regardless of the circumstances into which they are born. For that reason, I thank the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) for securing this debate today and for encouraging this consensus that is so unusual in this place.

The hon. Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) pointed out something that I think we would all agree on: if a child starts school when they are not school-ready, the entire school experience from primary 1 right through to the end of secondary is tainted by that. At worst, school is a very negative experience and at best it is tolerated. We have all talked about the importance of increasing the hours for early learning and childcare to 30 hours a week. That is to be applauded, but I want to pick up on some of the points that have been made. Fundamental to that increase is not simply providing childcare, but providing qualified professional experienced staff.

In Scotland, the 30 hours will be rolled out with the addition of 600 new early learning and childcare centres with 20,000 more fully qualified and professional staff.

[Patricia Gibson]

That is very important when rolling out extra childcare for the purposes of making sure that children are school-ready. But we can make all the policy decisions we like; we can sit here and pontificate and perhaps even throw investment, money and resources at the problem, but the experience at home is fundamental. We need to support parents at home as they bring up their children, particularly those who live in poverty and face much more challenging circumstances than we or they would like.

I want to bring a new dimension to the debate this morning because I believe that fundamental to child development, to being school-ready and to being a good citizen—indeed, fundamental to a happy life—is instilling a thirst for learning and an inquiring mind, and we do that through cultivating a love of reading. That must be nurtured in our children, but in order for us to nurture that in our children we need to nurture that in our citizens as widely as possible. That is why I will always argue and kick against any attempts to close libraries, particularly those in my own constituency.

I do not believe it is possible to talk about closing the attainment gap or raising attainment if we deprive citizens, particularly those in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, of access to books, because that is what closing down libraries too often means for too many of our citizens. Access to books for parents and for children is fundamentally and inextricably linked to reading attainment. If we want our children to come to school with inquiring minds, we must introduce them to books as early as possible: not just those living in poverty, but especially those living in poverty. We must support and encourage parents in their endeavours to read with their children so that reading becomes a part of what is done at home.

Alex Cunningham: The hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) talked about the fact that the most needy families do not necessarily engage. The same applies to books and libraries and getting people to go to libraries. What is the Scottish experience in getting people from deprived communities into libraries, and accessing early childcare as well?

Patricia Gibson: I am glad the hon. Gentleman has raised that point because in Scotland we have initiatives. We have the Bookbug, PlayTalkRead and Read, Write, Count campaigns, and every parent with a new child is given a bag of free books for their children. That experience is repeated intermittently as the child goes from birth to the age of five and is supported in nurseries where books—the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole talked about the Imagination Library—become integral to raising attainment.

I do not think it is possible to talk about raising attainment unless books are a big part of that equation, so I am delighted that the Scottish Government have taken that on board. I despair when I hear of libraries closing down in any part of the UK, because I know that that means depriving people of books. I grew up in a family where, if I had not had access to a local library, I would not have had access to books, because the school library, such as it was, did not really exist. Books are fundamental to a happy and fulfilled life, to feeding

the imagination and creativity, and to feeding the mind. Access to books is fundamental and must be part of this conversation.

Very often when we hear about libraries being closed down, it is about cost cutting and how we cannot afford them and need to make cuts, but some things we cannot count in pounds and pennies, such as what we get back in terms of informed citizens who are encouraged and supported, particularly those who have children. We obviously want to reach out to people who do not have children and who do not access the library, but we are talking about the next generation. We need to think about what we lose rather than what it might cost in pounds, shillings and pence. The Scottish Government's Bookbug, PlayTalkRead and Read, Write, Count campaigns offer universal support for parents regardless of their socio-economic circumstances. Everybody has a stake in this.

Closing the attainment gap is very important, and early intervention is the canvas on which we must paint everything that we do. Early intervention must be about instilling the love of reading into our citizens as they become parents. We cannot afford to leave our children behind: if they are not school-ready for a full school life, it creates all sorts of social problems for the future. How we support parents with young children is an investment in the future. We must in all conscience and from an ethical point of view try to create a more inclusive educational and social environment for our citizens as they grow up and have their own children. We owe it to our children and we owe it to our country.

10.37 am

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I hope to be brief so that I can give the Minister time to respond to the fantastic contributions that have been made. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on securing the debate and thank him for his kind words about our friend Jo in his opening comments. I concur with many of his comments, and particularly his recommendations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) made stark comments regarding the one in five children who still live in poverty. I pay tribute to him for his work in tackling that issue. The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) was passionate in her commitment to ensure that the problems of school-readiness and the early years are tackled. As she said, those are growing problems, especially in rural areas. The hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) reminded us that we must continue to consider all children, including those who live under devolved Administrations.

Getting a good start in life should not be a privilege; it is every child's right. I have documented how my mum could not read or write. I was one of those children who did not see a book before going into education, so I can personally say how important early intervention prior to school is. I am also proud that I was a recipient of wraparound services such as Sure Start when I was a young mum, and I concur with the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Bootle (Peter Dowd) about that. Those services gave me and many of my friends much-needed support and a hand up in difficult times. The

Labour Government were a trailblazer for early years intervention, and Sure Start is one of Labour's greatest legacies.

Unfortunately, however, under the current Government, childcare and early years services have been left chronically underfunded. Early intervention services are failing to reach those most in need. Families with young children have borne the brunt of unfair Government cuts, and that looks set to continue in the near future.

My hon. Friends the Members for Burnley (Julie Cooper) and for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) made important contributions about the importance of the early years—that critical time before the age of six. The early years are not only about childcare but about ensuring quality education, which is crucial. We need a bigger vision for early education and childcare. Our kids deserve the best early intervention services that are the envy of the world. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) talked about some of his fantastic work before coming to this place and about the importance of library services—he helped set up a library scheme.

When will the Government commit the funds and resources required to match the universal acknowledgement, which we have heard today, of the benefits of the early years system? The Government response to Munro was fine words but no action. Will the Minister explain why the Government did not commit to a statutory duty on local authorities? One in three of the families who were promised free extended childcare by the Government before the last election are now set to miss out, as a result of the Government failing to make their sums add up. That was starkly illustrated in the pilot area of York, where not one childcare provider out of 30 was willing to take up the additional 15 hours due to the pitiful payment of £3.95 per hour.

My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) spoke passionately about the closure of services in her constituency. Why were Labour programmes scrapped, such as the graduate leader fund, which supported graduates to work in private and voluntary nursery and childcare settings, and the requirement for Sure Start children's centres in the most disadvantaged areas?

In addition, real-terms spending per child on early education has fallen. There are 763 fewer Sure Start centres, child trust funds are ending, and maternity grants are being cut. Every child deserves an education that enables them to flourish in childhood and sets them up for life in Britain and the world. Early intervention is key to closing the life chances gap that exists for too many young people in constituencies such as mine.

The hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh) reminded us of the importance of play in the family setting for learning and development. The first 1,000 days of a child's life are crucial. What are the Government doing to recognise the importance of putting access to high-quality early education at the heart of Britain's mission to tackle inequality? Today, 3.7 million children are growing up in poverty in the UK, costing the Government about £29 billion a year.

Parental income can have a profound effect on the educational attainment and long-term life chances of millions of children. Family income remains the most significant factor in a child's success in education. Will the Minister at least acknowledge that changing child poverty targets could mean that thousands of children are forgotten, missed or left behind?

If we want to tackle poverty and build a truly productive economy, we need to look at how to make life easier for ordinary working families and help parents get back to work. The Government should be looking at how to ease the burden on working people and create a system of world-class early years provision. I am afraid their policies are doing just the opposite. Investing now in the essential formative years of a child's life will be an investment in our country's future.

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education

(Mr Sam Gyimah): I am pleased to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) on securing this important debate.

I agree that improving the life chances of our children is important to all of us, so I will first strike a note of consensus. In this country, we have strong cross-party consensus on the importance of the early years and the need to invest in them. The free entitlement offer was started by the most recent Labour Government, with 12.5 hours of free childcare for all three and four-year-olds. The coalition Government extended that to 15 hours, and the Conservative Government are doubling the entitlement to 30 hours.

In addition, the coalition Government introduced a free early education offer for the most disadvantaged two-year-olds, recognising that we have to start even earlier with disadvantaged children. We also introduced the early years pupil premium, extending the pupil premium in schools to the early years so that disadvantaged three and four-year-olds can get extra funding for reading and intellectual stimulation. I will come on to the detail of that later.

There is therefore cross-party consensus, and the direction of travel in policy is broadly similar. Sometimes, however, in such debates as today's, some Members seem to have an interest in making out that what is happening is really bad. I am not saying that we can afford to be complacent, but some good work is still going on in early years, in which we lead many parts of the world. For example, the entitlement to free early education for three and four-year-olds, which has an average take-up of about 96%, is unique in the OECD. We have achieved what many other countries in the OECD have not: a universal early education offer. We should be proud of that.

Alex Cunningham: I praise the Minister for his work on childcare, but although putting in all those resources is tremendous, universities are still withdrawing their early years teaching courses, because, as I said in my speech, they cannot attract applicants. The Public Accounts Committee has stated that the Department for Education has no "robust plans" to ensure that there are "enough qualified early years staff so that providers can continue to offer high quality"

education. What will he do about that? We can throw as many resources as we like at the problem, but if we do not have enough people being trained to do the job, we will not be able to deliver his ambition and mine.

Mr Gyimah: I will come on to the workforce strategy in more detail, but the simple point is that from 2019-20 we will be investing £6 billion a year in the free entitlement

[Mr Gyimah]

in this country, which is more than we have ever invested before. If we fund providers, they will be able to pay the quality staff that they need so that they can attract and retain them.

For the early years, we do not have a system such as we have in schools, in which the Government try to control the number of staff going in. Most of our early years sector consists of private or voluntary providers, so we need to ensure that they are adequately funded to be able to attract and retain high-quality staff. That is why the Government made a strategic choice to invest in early years provision even at a time when many other Departments were having to have their budgets retrenched.

Alex Cunningham: As I said, we have all those resources being poured in, but if people are not applying to go to university for the necessary training, how on earth do we get people in? How do we incentivise them further to get them into the profession, so that we can—I repeat—deliver his ambition and mine?

Mr Gyimah: As I said, later this year we will be publishing a workforce strategy to go along with the introduction of the 30 hours of free childcare for three and four-year-olds. The strategy will focus on removing barriers to attracting, retaining and promoting staff. However, I point out to the hon. Gentleman that 87% of the workforce are qualified to level 3 at the moment, compared with 81% in 2010. The proportion of graduates is steadily increasing, with 13% holding at least level 6 qualifications, compared with 8% in 2010. There is still a lot to do, but the direction of travel is positive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton rightly mentioned the take-up of the free entitlements, in particular by the most disadvantaged. The three-year-old offer is a huge success, with 93% of families taking it up, and 97% of families are choosing to take up the offer for four-year-olds. In the case of the two-year-old entitlement, which is for the most disadvantaged 40% of families, 70% are taking up the offer. It is worth remembering, however, that the take-up of those entitlements is voluntary. Parents do not have to enrol their children, so it is remarkable that we have that many parents doing so.

My hon. Friend made a good point about how we market offers to parents, especially the two-year-old offer. We knew that a lot of disadvantaged families were suspicious of having to send their children to school that early, which was how some perceived it. Or if the mother was at home looking after the child—it was often the mother—they wondered why they should send their child to a nursery. The fact that the Government were involved made some of them nervous, so we did a lot of work in the Department to find new and innovative ways of marketing to those parents, even recognising that changing the colour of an envelope would make it more likely that it would be opened. To some families, brown envelopes looked like they came from the Government, so they would not open them at all, but if we made the envelopes more interesting they were more likely to open them. We are conscious that we need to drive take-up, and we need to look constantly at innovative ways to do so.

Julie Cooper: The Minister is making some important points about encouraging parents to take up the offer. Does he recognise the real concerns of nursery school headteachers that are driving them to come down to Parliament in numbers with their governors—they are coming again tomorrow—to express concerns that they are no longer able to fund qualified teaching staff? That is particularly important in deprived areas.

Mr Gyimah: Nursery schools do a fantastic job. We will publish a reform of early years funding to go with the 30 hours' free childcare. I have had meetings with those people and understand their concerns. I can give an assurance that we recognise the important work that they do, particularly in disadvantaged areas, and I certainly want it to continue and will do what I can to ensure that it does.

Chloe Smith: An extremely brief factual question: will the Minister give us the results of his consultation and the funding formula he referred to before the summer recess, or should we await that a little later on?

Mr Gyimah: All I can say is that we want to provide that as soon as possible, because we understand the need for providers to prepare so that they can deliver the full 30 hours in 2017—it is in the “urgent” in-tray at the moment.

I will develop my points further and answer some of the questions that have been asked. On take-up, we will publish a workforce strategy shortly. Speech and language is absolutely important. If a child arrives at school and cannot communicate or recognise that those squiggly things on a page are words, and that words are used to form sentences, they have got a problem. One of the things the early years pupil premium is there for is for those disadvantaged kids to get extra funding—about £300 a head—and the nurseries can make a discretionary decision on how to spend that to ensure that those kids do not arrive at school already behind.

Melanie Onn: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Gyimah: I will not take any more interventions, because of the time.

We have introduced reforms to improve the standard of literacy in the early years, which has included awarding grants, for instance through the National Day Nurseries Association's literary champions programme, which supports practitioners to provide a high-quality, literacy-rich experience for all children. In 2015, 80% achieved the expected goal in communication and language, compared with 72% in 2013.

All of that sits in the broader context of life chances. School-readiness cannot be divorced from the broader discussion of life chances. Earlier this year, the Prime Minister set out his vision for improving life chances, and the Government want to transform the life chances of the poorest in our country and offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future.

We are already transforming lives. Since 2010, there are 449,000 fewer children living in workless households. The early years foundation stage framework is improving the quality of early education and care for young children, and our most recent results show that 66% are achieving a good level of development at that stage. A number of

hon. Members touched on that point. It is worth noting that 66% is an increase of 14.6 percentage points in the past two years. The quality of settings continues to improve, with the highest proportion ever—86% of settings—judged good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspections.

We know that some of the poorest children are already behind their peers by age three, before they start school. Such children miss out in the number of words they speak, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton pointed out, although the proportion of school children eligible for free school meals who achieve a good level of development is increasing—it was 51% last year, compared with 45% the year before. However, I will be the first to admit that we still have a long way to go.

Obviously, in considering school-readiness and life chances we also need to take into account what happens in the health sector. A number of hon. Members touched on that. All children aged from two to two and a half are offered a universal health and development review by a health visitor, which includes checking a child's communication development and referring families to more specialist support if necessary. One thing that I introduced when I became the Childcare Minister was an integrated review for children who are not in early years settings, so that health visitors could recommend and introduce parents to other support services that they might need.

To touch on a point raised by the hon. Member for Southport (John Pugh), we also published “What to expect, when?” so that parents know what they can do to support their children's development in the early years. It is easy for Government to think that we have all the answers, but children, especially in their early years, spend a disproportionate amount of time at home with their parents, so parents need to understand what good development is and what they can do to influence it. That is what our guide is meant to achieve.

Alex Cunningham: I am particularly interested in the role of health professionals and others who go into homes in the most deprived communities. What are the Minister's policy ideas and instructions to encourage them to play a greater role in directing families to the childcare and literacy support we want them to have?

Mr Gyimah: A lot of home visits are done by health visitors, which is incredibly important. Health visitors are trusted by parents and do a great job. The previous

Government and this Government have continued to invest in increasing the number of health visitors. I would like to see more joined-up activity between health and education in the early years. There are a number of great programmes out there, such as the Lambeth Early Action Partnership, which are successful because they join up health and education in early years interventions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) rightly touched on assessment. Obviously Ofsted is one way of holding nurseries accountable and assessing what they do—as I said, 86% of settings are rated good or outstanding—but the early years foundation stage profile is another way of ensuring that individual children reach a good level of development. That will become non-statutory in September, but we are looking at ways of ensuring that we continue to have such evaluation. She therefore raised a relevant and important point.

The point was made that we should differentiate between childcare and early education, especially when we talk about the 30 hours of childcare. I completely agree that childcare arranged for the purposes of parents' employment is completely different from early education. That is why the first 15 hours of the offer is universal—so that every three and four-year old in the country is entitled to 15 hours of free early education. Why 15 hours? Evidence from the effective pre-school, primary and secondary education longitudinal study, carried out over 13 years, suggests that children at that age need a little bit of education every now and again. They need little and often, not the equivalent of a school week at the age of three and four. The eligibility for the second 15 hours—the employment offer—is based around parents' work.

Alex Cunningham: Perhaps the Minister can give us a few seconds on workforce development.

Mr Gyimah: I have made it clear that we will publish the workforce strategy, which will look at workforce development.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) asked whether I would consider the bid by the Imagination Library. That bid is interesting, so I will take that on board and look at it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered children's early years development and school readiness.

Compensation for Rail Passengers

11 am

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered compensation for rail passengers.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. May I thank the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), for being here to respond on behalf of the Government? May I also apologise to her for once again raising an issue involving trains?

My constituency, as the Minister knows, is home to many commuters. We are just under an hour away from London Liverpool Street station, and tens of thousands of my constituents travel on the Great Eastern main line every day. I admit that they have many complaints—short formations; staff members being unavailable; broken toilets; and services disrupted by too much rain, wind, sun and every other type of weather. My Twitter feed is often inundated with criticisms of our train operator; most are valid, and some less so.

All of us in this House know that few things are more annoying than a delayed train. All too often, we have swept this issue under the carpet by saying that at least the trains are clean, and with laptops we can still work, even if we are delayed. We prioritise new rolling stock and free wi-fi as part of new franchises, but let us be clear. We cannot just think of these people as passengers stuck in a carriage going nowhere and being a bit annoyed. They are commuters who cannot make it into work due to factors beyond their control, and job insecurity can follow. They are parents unable to get home in time to have dinner with their children or put them to bed, missing out on something so important to their lives.

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud the Government for recognising this issue and not only investing in our railways but committing to reducing the threshold for compensation to 15 minutes from half an hour. The Government are also extending the Consumer Rights Act 2015 to our railways, which will allow for compensation when the service our constituents receive does not meet expectations. I have some thoughts on this matter—particularly on the urgency of implementation, but I will spare the Minister those on this occasion. Much more needs to be done on making it as easy as possible for passengers to receive any compensation they are owed. I hope the Minister will agree that the end point must be commuters automatically receiving compensation when their train is delayed.

Another issue, which is potentially even more frustrating, is that many franchise holders may be profiting from these delays. As I have mentioned, passengers are currently able to claim for compensation from train operators when they suffer delays greater than 30 minutes. What many probably do not realise is that Network Rail pays out compensation to train operators whenever there is disruption on the track. That compensation is known as schedule 8 payments. The guidance on those payments states that their purpose is to

“compensate train operators for the financial impact of poor performance attributable to Network Rail and other train operators”. That is not unreasonable; I do not think any of us would believe it is. Given that we do not have vertically integrated lines, Network Rail is responsible for track

and signalling. Who would want to take on a franchise if they were financially liable for things beyond their control?

The problem is that there can be a big gap between the amount of compensation train operators receive from Network Rail through schedule 8 payments and the amount of compensation then paid out to passengers for delays. For example, Abellio Greater Anglia—the train operator that runs the line in my constituency—last year received £8.56 million in compensation from Network Rail for disruption. How much did it pay out to passengers for delays that year? Just £2.3 million. That is a subsidy of more than £6 million, and it is not a one-off. East Midlands Trains received £11 million from Network Rail but only paid out £516,000 to passengers. Southeastern received £7.09 million but paid out £1.35 million. Southern, which we know has issues at the moment, received £28.54 million from Network Rail and paid only £1.6 million to passengers. That is nearly a £27 million difference.

I know that train operators would say we cannot compare those figures and that they measure different things, but my response is simple. On seeing the massive subsidies for delays that operators are receiving, the average person will ask, “What incentive do our franchise holders have to push Network Rail to tackle these issues? Why would they demand better infrastructure when they are profiting from my disruption as a commuter?” As I mentioned, I welcome the Government cutting the threshold for when passengers can receive compensation. However, I truly believe we need further reform. We need to deal with the subsidy for delays.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): May I praise my hon. Friend for securing this debate on an extremely important issue and for the research he has done into the figures? It is essential that we highlight what is effectively a double subsidy. After all, it is a subsidy to Network Rail from the taxpaying population who are using the trains to get to work that is going back to the train companies they are already buying tickets from. It seems rather extraordinary that people are now paying twice for delayed trains, not just once.

Will Quince: My hon. Friend raises a good point. I strongly believe that rail operators should not receive more in schedule 8 payments than their passengers receive in compensation for delays and the cost of handling the disruption, and I have a solution.

One option is to claw back the difference to Network Rail and ring-fence the money for infrastructure improvements in the line, which I am sure the Minister would like. That would tackle the issue by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure was funded and delivered on. However, given that we believe very much in devolution, localism and empowering our constituents, we should ensure that passengers have a say on how the money is used, even if it is not in the form of direct compensation. I suggest that the Government seek to change the terms of our franchise agreements to require that, at the end of every financial year, train operators put any net difference between these amounts into a fund to be controlled by a local railway panel. That panel could be modelled on local highways panels and involve local authorities, businesses and rail passenger groups. It would listen to passengers on how they would like the

extra funds to be used to improve their railway, whether it is through extra benches at stations, cleaner trains, stronger wi-fi or more staff.

I accept that that may not be possible without being subject to judicial review while train operators have existing franchise contracts. Instead, we should make those conditions part of all new franchise agreements, coming into effect on each line whenever the franchise comes up for renewal. No one disagrees with Network Rail compensating franchise holders when there are delays due to infrastructure problems, but it is not right that train operating companies are able to receive more money in compensation for delays than they pay out to their passengers. It is a subsidy for failure. We need to stop rail operators profiting from the disruption of passengers' lives and end the subsidy they are receiving from delays.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): It is the norm for Members to have the permission of the proposer of the motion and the Minister if they wish to speak, but if both are happy, there is time.

Will Quince *indicated assent*.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): Delighted.

11.9 am

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): My apologies, Mr Evans. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) for securing this debate and permitting me to speak in it.

As the Minister knows, my constituents are currently subject to the most appalling rail services, made catastrophically worse this week by the introduction of the emergency timetable on the Southern railway part of the network, which has seen as many as four out of five trains per hour completely withdrawn from stations in my constituency.

In that context, I would like to raise two issues about compensation. The first relates to the compensation scheme as it currently works for commuter rail services in the metropolitan area in a normal scenario. Even with a reduction to a 15-minute delay for eligibility for compensation, the compensation scheme is still designed for longer journeys. My constituents commuting into central London have a maximum journey time of 25 minutes from the furthest away station in the constituency, so a 30-minute delay is a delay of more than 100% of their scheduled journey time and a 15-minute delay is still a delay of more than 50% of their journey time. In some cases, there has to be a delay double the scheduled journey time before they are eligible for compensation. The compensation scheme needs to be revised in order to be fit for purpose in normal circumstances for commuter rail services in London.

The second issue is the utter inadequacy of compensation arrangements in the context of the current Southern railway emergency timetable. To claim compensation at all, passengers need to demonstrate proof that they have taken the journey that they set out to take. This week in my constituency, all trains stopping on the Southern railway network in my constituency are full.

There is no possibility of my constituents taking the trains that they set out to take, because they simply cannot board them. I will add that I was horrified, after reading that Southern rail is advertising a replacement bus service, to learn that no replacement bus service is provided by Southern rail at all. It is asking passengers to get on existing and already overcrowded Transport for London bus services. Essentially, it is just asking passengers to make their journey by any other means possible. My question to the Minister is this: how are my constituents to be compensated in the current context for what is in effect the large-scale withdrawal of commuter rail services from south-east London?

11.11 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. If my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince) will forgive me, I will try to address directly the points made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), because of course the Southern rail situation is very much at the front of my mind and the minds of others.

The hon. Lady knows that the emergency timetable was put in place to try to restore some reliability to the services. It was almost impossible for someone to know whether they could actually get on a train and get home, and a decision was taken—I am sorry it has affected the hon. Lady's constituents in that way—that where there were alternative services, whereby people could make an alternative journey on an additional service, the services would be withdrawn temporarily in order that 85% of the services could run. I was not aware that the replacement bus services to which she referred were actually just an invitation to take a bus journey, so I will certainly take that up, because I had reviewed carefully the planning of alternative provision and was told that it was satisfactory.

The hon. Lady's point about compensation is well made. From my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister downwards, there have been conversations about how to target compensation for a sustained period of disruption. As the hon. Lady knows, back in April, when we met, performance on the whole network was running at about 84%. That was not good enough, but it was certainly on an upward trend. Since then, a whole series of issues, particularly in relation to industrial action, have caused the service in effect to become completely unreliable. I welcome the company's commitment to reliability. The determination to get the majority of people to work and home in a more predictable pattern is good, but I take her point about compensation seriously, and although I cannot answer it today, I will certainly come back to her in the weeks ahead.

Let me turn to the substance of my hon. Friend's debate. I congratulate him, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) did, on once again being an extremely eloquent and well informed presenter of his arguments. He is always a joy to work with and to listen to, and although I may not have all the answers, he certainly always prompts me to go away and think even harder about the problems. I am also grateful for the other views that were expressed.

The logic of my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester is of course impeccable. When we look at the numbers, it does seem very bizarre that companies are paid

[*Claire Perry*]

compensation by Network Rail that they then do not pay out fully to customers. He and I know that behind the very clear logic is a whole series of complicated financial relationships relating to a future earnings hit to franchising, and relating to the fact that many franchises are not in a premium-paying position. They are subsidised by the taxpayer because of the social benefit of rail, so simply to say that the money should automatically be paid out to passengers risks unpicking the financial relationships and contracts that sit behind the railway system today.

However, I completely agree with my hon. Friend that, for too long, people taking train services have been almost treated as an afterthought in the system. One of the things that I have been so pleased to see in my last two years as Minister with responsibility for rail is that customers are being put front and centre of the franchising process. My hon. Friend will know from the current franchise competition on his line of the absolute commitment to delivering a much better service on brand-new trains and contracting for that. It is not contracting for the inputs—“Do you clean your stations; do you buy trains?”—but considering what the service actually looks like for customers. That is the start of a long focus on customer satisfaction that we all need to get to.

I will touch on the technical points about schedule 8 just in case there is one fact that my hon. Friend does not know, although I suspect that is unlikely, given that he is right across this brief. Schedule 8 payments compensate train operators for delays of which Network Rail is the cause. That is a contractual and commercially confidential element set up between Network Rail and each operator, overseen in this case by the regulator, not the Department. It does not include provision for additional costs, so train operators may argue that they pay out almost from a separate pot to compensate for provision of alternative bus services or, indeed, other compensation payments.

The compensation regime across the country is based on the passengers charter. As hon. Members will know, there is a discrepancy between some operators, which pay out on delay repay—I will address later the point about delay repay 30—and those that are still on the national conditions of carriage, which is a slightly less generous regime. Hon. Members will know that the Government are determined to get all franchises on to the same basis through the process of negotiating about franchising. Actually, we want to accelerate that through negotiations and perhaps not just wait for the franchises to come up for renewal. Interestingly, the headline compensation numbers for delay repay show that they are among the most generous in Europe, certainly when compared with other transport systems. People do not get a compensation payment if, for example, their long-distance coach is delayed; they just have to sit there and suck it up.

There was a proposal earlier this year. I was advised that we should have a permanent exemption for the railway industry from the Consumer Rights Act 2015, which I completely rejected, because in my view train companies are simply providing customers with a service. In this case, it happens to be taking a train from A to B. There was no logic in providing a permanent exemption,

so I have granted basically a one-year grace period for the industry to get itself aligned before that Act comes completely into force. Of course, the work that Nicola Shaw has done for the Department, whereby she proposes aligning Network Rail's route provision much more closely with the operating companies and joining that up, is another way of ensuring that those companies deliver a much more flexible and responsive service.

Currently, as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood—I consider the hon. Lady a friend—we have a T-plus-30 trigger point for delay repay, which is not appropriate for many metro-style journeys. The other problem is that not everyone claims. Indeed, estimates suggest that only 12% of those who are eligible actually put in a claim.

The Department has been doing two things: first, it has been looking at how best to introduce a T plus 15 for delay repay, which I hope to be announcing shortly. I am not sure what the average journey time is for the hon. Lady's constituents, but there is the possibility that it will capture at least some of them. Secondly, the Department has been looking at improving how compensation is paid. For example, compensation used to be paid in vouchers, which seems ridiculous in a world where people use cash or cards. That has been changed so that all passengers can receive compensation in cash instead of in rail vouchers.

We are also very much committed to the idea of automatic compensation, and I want to highlight the work that c2c has done on the Southend lines. It will be of interest to the hon. Lady, because c2c customers who are using its automatic payment card—about 25% of season-ticket holders—start to receive compensation if their train is delayed by even a minute. It is a pence-per-minute deal, so it means that their time is valuable. I think it starts after two minutes of delay—the clock is ticking and they receive compensation—and we want to see that right across the industry. Hon. Members will also be aware that Virgin Trains West Coast has introduced automatic compensation. If someone books a ticket through their website, they do not have to do anything to claim should the train be delayed; the money will automatically come through to their account.

There has been a lot of progress in the industry on compensation, but I absolutely recognise the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester has made. I am very keen to think about—either through franchising or through some of the alternative structures that Nicola Shaw suggested—how we can hold money that is paid out for poor performance in a way that targets it more specifically towards improvements on the line. My hon. Friend knows that I am sympathetic to the spirit of his proposal. It is a question of how we make it work in the often byzantine world of current railway structures.

Ultimately, what customers want is not to have to fuff around with compensation claims; they want a reliable service that they can depend on to get to work and to get home. A major change that we are starting to see is about capturing the value of that reliability. I hope hon. Friends and hon. Members in the Chamber will have noticed the move among those in the industry to stop talking about punctuality as a train that arrives between five and 10 minutes late, focusing instead on the “right time”. If we arrive 10 minutes late to a debate, we are late, even though, in train terms, we are perfectly on

time and everything is normal. I want to flag up the recent industry-led proposals to move to a “right time” railway and to measure performance and compensation claims from the “right time”, which the industry is moving rapidly to introduce. Ultimately, we want a “right time” railway, where people are confident in its reliability. That is what is driving this Government’s record investment in rail, but I am very sympathetic to all the points that have been made today, because if customers do not see and feel that benefit, we are not all collectively doing our job.

Question put and agreed to.

11.21 am

Sitting suspended.

North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust

[VALERIE VAZ *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the performance of North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust serves two thirds of my constituency and more than 350,000 people living in Enfield, Haringey and the surrounding areas. I am grateful for the opportunity to bring this important matter before the House.

The situation at the hospital is, frankly, a scandal. It operates the busiest emergency department in London, which is attended by more than 500 people a day, yet the Care Quality Commission has rated safety at the emergency department as inadequate. Medical care, including older people’s care, at the hospital also requires extensive and immediate improvement. The senior leadership team at the trust and the Government have serious questions to answer about how patient safety at North Mid has been allowed to have been put at grave risk.

What has been happening at the hospital has major implications for my constituents, for residents in north London and for health services across the capital and beyond. My speech will consider all those issues and the steps that need to be taken to ensure the safety of patients and the quality of care. I will call on the Government to give assurances that services at the hospital, including those provided by the accident and emergency department, will be protected and improved in the short and long term.

Before I get to the heart of the matter, I should make two important points. First, the many concerns and criticisms that I will raise about what has happened at the hospital are not directed at the front-line staff—the doctors, nurses and trainees who work there. They are overworked and under-resourced, and have been doing a challenging job in incredibly difficult circumstances. The CQC has made it clear that:

“Most staff were competent and endeavoured to provide good care and outcomes for patients.”

However, just like the patients, the front-line staff have been badly let down by poor management and a lack of leadership at the hospital, and by the Government’s health policies over the past six years, which have left the national health service on its knees.

My second point is one that I believe is shared by all London MPs whose constituents have been affected by the performance of the hospital. Although all of us have raised concerns about how North Mid has been operating, we were not made aware of the true extent of the crisis at the hospital until the CQC issued a warning notice at the beginning of June, requiring the trust significantly to improve the treatment of patients attending the A&E. That was almost two full months after its unannounced inspection of the hospital in April.

Many recent revelations about the chaos at North Mid have been exposed only because of the press via leaked documents, yet it appears that the terrible situation has been an open secret in health circles for a significant period of time.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I hesitate to interrupt my right hon. Friend, who is laying out the story so comprehensively. Is she as concerned as I am that many health professionals knew what was going on, but that MPs in the three boroughs covered by the trust were kept in the dark?

Joan Ryan: That was exactly the case and I am very concerned. It is not an exaggeration to say we were kept in the dark. All of us across Enfield and Haringey have, over the past year, raised the issue of North Mid in the Chamber at a local level and with Ministers at various times. We received no information until a recent meeting with the Minister, who, I am pleased to say, is here today. Prior to that, there was almost no answer to the points that we raised, other than to brush them aside with answers such as how much better the NHS is doing now than ever before. The phrase “kept in the dark” absolutely covers the situation, with those in the know including the likes of NHS Improvement, NHS England, the General Medical Council, Health Education England and, no doubt, the Department of Health. However, but for the actions of the General Medical Council and Health Education England, the situation for patient safety could be even worse.

I have had a number of meetings with the senior leadership teams at North Mid and at the Enfield clinical commissioning group, and many of the problems I will discuss today were not thought noteworthy enough to bring to my attention. If they were brought to my attention, the exposure of those problems was minimal, such that they did not raise the alarm bells that they should have.

In May, the severity of the situation at the hospital was discussed at a high-risk summit, involving several north London hospital trusts, clinicians and other stakeholders. MPs were not even informed that the summit was happening, never mind informed of the outcomes. I would be interested to know whether the Minister thinks that that state of affairs is acceptable given that our constituents have to suffer the consequences of the failures at the hospital. Even as of today, despite numerous requests, we have received no minutes of the high-risk summit and no account of what was discussed in any detail whatever.

Would the Government be willing to bring in early warning measures to ensure that MPs and constituents are kept properly informed about impending healthcare crises in their communities, rather than being notified after the crisis has hit? To do our job on behalf of our constituents—to safeguard their safety and interests in the use of and access to one of the most important public services any of us can imagine—we need some kind of early warning system. It is clear that very many people knew about the situation, but nobody who is accountable to the public at a local level was properly informed. I look forward to the Minister’s response to that point.

I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) in her place, as the hospital is just inside her constituency, although it serves a large number of my constituents and constituents from Hornsey and Wood Green. I think it also serves practically the whole of Tottenham—my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) is in his place, as is the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes).

I am pleased to say that we have been working cross-party on the issue. Frankly, I will work with anyone—other hon. Members involved would do the same—who is willing to put the hospital first.

The CQC’s damning report into North Mid was published on Wednesday 6 July, and its inspection of the emergency department and two medical wards at the hospital was in response to a

“number of serious incidents...which had raised concerns about the standards of care”.

Between March 2015 and March 2016, there were 22 cases at North Mid’s A&E department where patients experienced serious or permanent harm or alleged abuse, or where a service provision was threatened. The CQC found that people were waiting far too long to be assessed on first arriving at the hospital, to see a doctor and to be moved to specialist wards in the hospital. The main experience of anybody turning up at the hospital’s emergency department was to wait, wait and then wait again.

The report tells of a lack of respect and dignity in how patients were treated, including a time when there was only

“one commode available in the whole of the ED”—
emergency department—

“to serve over 100 patients.”

Most people reading this will find that shocking.

Resources had been so stretched that, by the time the CQC issued its warning notice to the hospital in June, only seven of 15 emergency department consultants were in post, and seven of 13 middle-grade emergency doctors. As a consequence, junior doctors and medical trainees have been left unsupported by senior staff in A&E at night, including in emergency paediatric care. Junior doctors have been asked to perform tasks for which they are not yet qualified, and there have even been reports of receptionists with no medical training being used to triage patients, at least to the extent of deciding whether they should go to urgent care or the emergency department.

In February, A&E staff were so overwhelmed that patients, many of whom had already been waiting for hours, were told that they should go home unless they thought their illness was life-threatening. How can anyone be expected to know how ill they are without seeing a doctor? We have self-service checkouts in our supermarkets, but self-service A&E? I think not.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for securing the debate. Even though the hospital is not in my constituency, much of what she describes happens in hospitals in my constituency and just outside it. At Central Middlesex hospital, which is just outside my constituency but serves many of my constituents, healthcare provision has also been affected by cuts. A recent inspection by the CQC similar to the one that she is describing highlighted a lack of experienced medics for seriously ill patients. Does she agree that such staff shortages threaten patient safety?

Joan Ryan: I do indeed, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. One point that I argue most strongly is that, although the MPs concerned are banding together to defend our hospital and fight for adequate and safe service, it is obvious that this is not

just about North Mid—North Mid is just the first point where the crisis has hit. This is an issue around outer London, across London and probably nationally, particularly for district general hospitals.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has secured this debate, which resonates across London and probably outside it. We recognise the point about waiting, especially in ambulances outside hospitals. People are waiting for up to four hours and then being admitted just before the four-hour mark, so that it is not registered against the time limit, and then waiting again. That is happening even before the planned closures of accident and emergency departments. As one clinician said to me just today, there is no credible clinical evidence that out-of-hospital services can deliver on the scale necessary, but that is all we are being offered as an alternative.

Joan Ryan: I agree with my hon. Friend. Again, that demonstrates that this is not just about North Mid; it is just that North Mid has reached the crisis point before anywhere else.

The CQC has also raised concerns about the lack of equipment within the department, from missing monitors and missing leads for cardiac machines to trolleys in resuscitation rooms that are not fully equipped. I cannot imagine the distress of a patient with chest pains who is connected to a cardiac machine to monitor their progress, only to find that the staff member cannot connect it up to get an instant read-out because the leads are not there. Even a chute meant to carry specimens from the emergency department to the pathology unit was out of operation for six whole weeks. According to the CQC, “this caused major delays to the speed in which results were returned to the department, thus slowing down the time in which some patients could be treated.”

That is unacceptable.

All those problems have been exacerbated by a lack of effective clinical leadership and a culture of bullying at the hospital, meaning that staff do not feel confident in raising concerns and have even

“stopped reporting incidents of staff shortage as management had not responded to them in the past”.

A quality visit report by Health Education England from March 2016 found that none of the medical trainees interviewed would recommend the emergency department to their family and friends for treatment, principally because they felt that the department was unsafe. The postgraduate trainee junior doctors at the hospital would not themselves recommend the hospital or the emergency department to their family and friends—what an indictment.

The General Medical Council, which oversees the standard of training for doctors, has threatened to ban North Mid from providing postgraduate training because standards have been so poor. The loss of junior doctors would leave the A&E so badly understaffed that it would effectively close. The future of North Mid’s emergency department is at risk.

I note that the chief inspector of hospitals—Professor Sir Mike Richards, whom a number of us are due to meet tomorrow—has said that since the CQC’s inspection in April, “some progress” has been made to improve the situation, although there is

“still much more that needs to be done.”

A new clinical leadership team has been put in place, and there have been moves to appoint more senior doctors. However, in almost every instance, the new appointments are short-term, with the doctors taken on loan from other hard-pressed local hospitals for up to six months. The situation is safe at the moment, given the number of doctors in the A&E, but the measures are only a sticking plaster, as many of the doctors are on a three to six-month loan. What measures are the Government willing to put in place to support North Mid and ensure that it has the consultants and doctors it requires on a permanent, long-term basis?

The CQC also states that North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust

“has supplied an action plan setting out the steps it will take to address the concerns identified in the Warning Notice and report.”

Does the Minister agree that the action plan should be published in full and updated regularly with the measures taken to improve patient safety at the hospital?

Tellingly, the CQC says that previous serious incident investigations and subsequent action plans at the hospital have not always been shared with staff in a timely manner, which has

“meant that in certain circumstances, reports were received when actions should already have been taken in order to mitigate against a future occurrence.”

Given the analysis of how things have been kept in the dark, which we have explored, and that statement from the CQC, the Minister will understand why I ask for a fully published action plan and regular reports on progress. This is about implementation and outcomes.

Surely the Minister will understand that without full transparency, many of my constituents and those of my colleagues who are here today will have little confidence that the required improvements have been made and are being sustained. As I said earlier, the trust’s shocking mismanagement and poor leadership have played a big part in creating the mess at North Mid, but the chief executive, who I understand is stepping down, is not solely responsible for what has happened. The Government cannot be let off the hook when they have done so much to undermine healthcare provision in Enfield.

The tipping point for the crisis at North Mid was the closure of the A&E department at Chase Farm hospital in my constituency. In 2007, the then Leader of the Opposition—the current Prime Minister, for now—posed outside Chase Farm hospital and promised to protect the emergency department on site. By 2013, his Conservative-led Government had ripped the heart out of the hospital, closing both the A&E unit and the maternity services. It went from a 480-bed hospital to one with 48 surgical beds. Those of us who campaigned against the closure at the time said that the decision would put huge pressure on North Middlesex hospital, Barnet hospital, our ambulance services and GP surgeries right across Enfield. We were right.

Andy Slaughter: My right hon. Friend describes exactly our experience in west London, where two A&E departments have closed and two more are intended to close, despite assurances having been given that they would not. We have heard nothing at all since February 2013 about what those plans will be. I was told just this week that the next report is not going to be in September,

[*Andy Slaughter*]

so until another report is done we will not know exactly what services there will be. People are waiting in limbo for years, and meanwhile there is a drain of staff and expertise from hospitals, so their closure becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Joan Ryan: And that is exactly what happened at Chase Farm hospital. It was under threat for so long that it had no stability and it was no longer an attractive place for staff because they had no security. I hope I am wrong, but my fear is that in cases such as my hon. Friend outlines, no news is definitely not good news.

One year after the closure of Chase Farm's A&E department, the CQC reported that services at North Mid were struggling with the additional workload. We know now that the hospital has had to manage an increase in A&E patients of between 20% and 25% as a result. That is unmanageable and unsustainable for an A&E department; many would bend, if not break, if put under such strain. The situation was so bad that by February 2016 only 67% of patients were seen and treated within the national four-hour target at North Mid, compared with an average of 88% across England.

Our local health services and the emergency department at North Mid would have been better placed to cope with the closure of Chase Farm's A&E department if other promises to improve primary care had been fulfilled. In November 2013, the Prime Minister stood at the Dispatch Box and said:

"Enfield is...getting an increase in primary care funding. That is part of our plan of not cutting but expanding our NHS."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2013; Vol. 570, c. 1226.]

But many people in Enfield find it really hard to get a doctor's appointment when they need one. Over the last six years, 12 doctors' surgeries in Enfield have closed and only one new practice has opened. That is why, even though Enfield is now the fourth-biggest borough in London, we have fewer GPs per head than almost anywhere in the capital. That situation is not sustainable.

Will the Minister join me in calling for a proper plan for at least 84 more GPs in Enfield over the next four years, as recommended by the Royal College of General Practitioners? Will he support my calls to improve health funding across the board in Enfield? As he will know, Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust anticipates a £13 million deficit by 2016-17; Enfield Council needs to deliver a saving of £24 million in adult social care by 2020 because of reductions in funding from central Government; and per capita spending on public health in Enfield is only £43 this year, far lower than the average across London and in England. Given that cutting preventive services piles pressure on hospitals, does he seriously believe that allowing the current situation to continue will take the strain off North Mid—or will it in fact do the exact opposite?

It should come as no surprise that I and many of my constituents have very little faith that the NHS is safe in the Government's hands. The financial crisis in the NHS is a major reason why North Mid did not have enough equipment, consultants, doctors and nurses to cope with demand. The inability to recruit permanent staff has meant that many hospitals, including North Mid, have been forced to drain their resources on expensive agency workers and locums. One might have thought

that, in the light of such circumstances, the Government would be bending over backwards to encourage people to join the medical profession—but no. Instead we are witnessing the sorry situation of a Government fighting with junior doctors over contracts and removing bursaries for nurses. What a slap in the face for the future front-line staff we so desperately need.

The Government also plan to make £22 billion of efficiency savings by 2020. I know that savings must be found, particularly in back-office services, but efficiencies on such a scale simply cannot be achieved without putting patient care at risk. I am also concerned that the Government's methods to implement those cuts—described using woolly phrases like "the rationalisation of clinical facilities", "the consolidation of trusts" or "the introduction of transformation and sustainability plans"—will result in takeovers, mergers and the downgrading of services. Even before the crisis at North Mid was revealed, plans were already afoot to launch an NHS pilot programme, involving the Royal Free London NHS Trust, to look at options to link hospitals including North Mid together and to merge clinical and support services. At the same time that it was announced that the chief executive of North Mid was going on leave, we learned that an acting chief executive was being appointed from the trust and that David Sloman, the trust's chief executive—a very good chief executive, I might add—would be taking on the role of accountable officer on an interim basis. I fear for the future of service provision at North Mid as a consequence.

Local residents remember to their cost that the A&E and maternity units at Chase Farm were shut only a few months before the Royal Free London NHS Trust took over Barnet and Chase Farm hospitals in 2014. Chase Farm has been left as little more than a cottage hospital. North Mid cannot suffer the same fate; that would have terrible consequences for health services across North London. Think how much further people in Enfield would have to travel to get emergency hospital treatment, and how much pressure it would put on A&E departments at hospitals such as University College hospital in Euston, Barnet hospital and the Royal Free hospital in Hampstead.

What assurances will the Minister give my constituents, first that North Middlesex hospital will not be taken over by the Royal Free London NHS Trust by stealth, using this crisis as the back door to a merger; secondly, that constituents will be consulted fully on all future proposals for North Mid; and thirdly and most importantly, that its key services will be protected and improved in the short and long term? The performance of North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust must be a wake-up call for the Government. I urge the Minister to use every tool at his disposal to help North Mid make the immediate improvements required in the quality of care provided to patients. The Government must ensure that the hospital and our health services have the funding and support they need so that this situation never happens again. I look forward to the Minister's response.

2.58 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, which is vital for my constituents and for all those around Enfield and Haringey. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for securing it and for presenting a comprehensive case for the need for urgent action and reassurance for our constituents about the sustainable

future of North Middlesex hospital. She has tempted me on to a political path: plainly this is a cross-party concern and call for action, but mention was made of the outgoing Prime Minister. I remember reminding a previous outgoing Prime Minister, Mr Blair, at his last Prime Minister's questions—those are now coming up for the current Prime Minister—that he had said that there were

“24 hours to save the NHS”,

but that his Government had decided to downgrade Chase Farm hospital. There is a lot of history to this, but I will avoid, if I can, being tempted down that route.

I believe that, because of the Government's investment, Chase Farm and the Royal Free hospitals have a secure future that is not shackled by the private finance initiative deals that have severely affected Barnet and North Middlesex hospitals. In terms of resources, they are paying a big mortgage, and in relation to finances they have been chasing their tail. Sadly, A&E has been part of that tail. In April, the hospital was whacked with a £320,000 financial penalty, which made a significant dent in its finances and contributed significantly to the £8.3 million deficit with which it is struggling to deal.

The issue is with the A&E. I want reassurances from the Government that someone will take responsibility and action will be taken. Many of us have been expressing concern about local A&E provision for far too long. The concern is that responsibility has not been taken and there has been no proper action. In short, how bad does it have to get before someone takes responsibility and action is taken?

Like the right hon. Member for Enfield North, I pay tribute to staff. We all do. There are obviously great, dedicated staff. Many of us will know them—they are friends and people we know locally. They are as concerned about what is happening as anyone else. Later in my speech, I will say a little more about my experience as a patient in the A&E department two years ago. I saw things for myself, and there are regular reports. The Care Quality Commission made particular reference to the “caring and compassionate” work and service of staff. The current situation is letting them down.

Health Education England and the General Medical Council said that, as much as there was a duty of care to patients, there was a duty of care to doctors training at the hospital, which was why there was such profound, extraordinary, exceptional concern that they reached the point of threatening to pull doctors out. We know that that threat will not be realised, that a corner has been turned and action taken, but why did it take this long for such urgent, expensive crisis management to take place? There were earlier warning signals, so why was there no proper plan?

It is all very well having a new programme calling for “safer, faster, better” services, but for goodness' sake our constituents expect a safer, faster, better service without a new programme having to be put together, no doubt in glossy print and at considerable expense. They expect a basic service, not a new programme. They have been expecting that for far too long and have been let down.

The 10-year context is important. Despite some interruptions, we can all testify to that 10-year journey. It is so very frustrating because the context is positive: the journey of the Barnet, Enfield and Haringey clinical strategy since 2005-06. We can have our criticisms and

our campaigns, but the context is London's biggest reorganisation of acute services in more than a decade, which was inevitably going to be a challenge. It inevitably needed a careful plan and serious clinical leadership—not just proper clinical leadership in secondary care and the appropriate number of consultants and middle-grade doctors, but the appropriate primary care. Those of us who were involved in the discussions heard the promises from Sir George Alberti, and the talk about bridging loans and the pump priming of primary care, which was also necessary. Sadly, we are seeing the lack of all those things at the same time.

Nevertheless, North Middlesex hospital has been physically transformed since 2009, when it was mostly old Victorian buildings that were not fit for purpose. Those buildings were demolished and a new £123 million modern hospital took shape. That was incredibly welcome, as was the added investment. Some £80 million of public funds was invested to provide the new facilities in line with the reorganisation in the BEH strategy. The plan was, quite properly, to modernise the older facilities, and the hospital has been visibly transformed. Sadly, though, the service that has been provided to constituents has not matched the modern facilities from which they are now able to benefit.

North Middlesex has become one of the busiest A&E departments in the capital, so it is plain that no one can afford it to close. I know the Minister can counter the suggestion that there is any risk of closure, and I am sure he will reassure us that it will not close in any way, that there will be no partial closure and that it will continue, with a long-term, sustainable future. Nevertheless, the concern is why, with all that investment having gone in—initially private finance initiative investment, then direct taxpayer-funded investment—it has taken until this point, so far down the line, for regulators to be able to tell everyone what we all knew far earlier.

I have read the trust's minutes from 26 May, which state:

“Since the problems first surfaced last year, we have been open with our health partners about the challenges and have worked closely with them to tackle the many interlinked contributory factors, both internally and in the local health care system.”

Well, the problems did not first surface in 2015. I was a patient two years ago and saw for myself that there were problems when I was sitting on a trolley for 11 or 12 hours and was missed by very busy, overstretched staff who were dealing with so many patients. It was an ordinary summer's day in June—not a winter's day—and there were more than 400 patients. The staff were absolutely overstretched and missed my CT scan. Lo and behold, my appendix burst. It could have been fatal. That happened because no one was available to take any responsibility for what was happening.

There was real concern about the leadership of staff who were overstretched. I raised the alarm then, as did others. Indeed, the CQC happened to be inspecting the A&E on the very weekend I was sitting on that trolley and seeing for myself the huge challenges it faced. The CQC said that the A&E required improvements. Its report recognised that the hospital was fully embracing the reconfiguration of services, but also said:

“While the hospital had achieved much in absorbing increased numbers of patients, its infrastructure of staffing levels, training provision, complaints handling and governance had been stretched, and there had been an underestimate of the resources needed to maintain services at the current level.”

[Mr David Burrowes]

The warning signals had gone out. Why was prompt action not taken to provide sufficient numbers of consultants and middle-grade doctors?

On Chase Farm hospital, one of the bottom lines for the reconfiguration was the fact that, true to the Prime Minister's words, we had a moratorium and delayed the previous Government's plans. All options were looked at, but it came back to the unanimous clinical advice from the local doctors and others, who said that it was in the best interest of the patients for the reconfiguration to take place. Why? They referred particularly to the lack of consultants and middle-grade doctors. That meant that Chase Farm had to be downgraded and A&E patients referred to Barnet and to North Middlesex.

How can it have come to pass that, three years later, we are still hearing the same excuse—that there are not enough consultants or middle-grade doctors? It is completely unacceptable. Why is the system not reacting quicker? Whoever the system is—whether it is the chief executives of the trust or the ever-changing roll-call of interim managers and directors of NHS Improvement, NHS London or NHS England, or, indeed, Ministers themselves—why has it taken so long, with the regulators threatening to pull out doctors, for everyone to pull out their fingers and turn the corner that has now been turned? It is not good enough.

Without my permission—there was a leak—the *Daily Mail* did a big splash on my experience, and there has been tension ever since about other very serious incidents, some of which have already been mentioned. There was the awful example of someone who had died being left unattended for four hours. There were other shocking and deplorable incidents. Staff themselves see it as something that shames them as well. Managers say to me, “Why hasn't more action been taken?”

Until July 2015, the A&E department, which is in a very challenging London hospital, was performing relatively well against the standard of seeing and admitting or discharging 95% of patients within four hours. In the first four months of 2015-16, the hospital continued at 94% to 95%. We have to recognise that it has undergone extraordinary growth. Compared with 2013, before the BEH changes were implemented, the hospital now has 25% more staff, cares for 19% more A&E patients, admits 44% more patients, undertakes 44% more surgical operations and procedures, sees 27% more patients in outpatients, and delivers 37% more babies. Yes, all of that is happening.

Of course, performance dipped in other trusts in the country and the downturn continued in January 2016, but when it reached a low of 66%—yes, it recovered slightly to 70%—why were those signals not heeded? How could it get to that level and no urgent action is taken? It was mentioned by hon. Members and others at the time, so why was urgent action not taken? Why was somebody not ready to seize it and say, “We are not going to wait for these regulators, the CQC, to come and tell us down the line that it is inadequate, or for the HEE and GMC to say it is not even safe for doctors, let alone for patients?” Why did it take so long? How bad does it have to get? Why does our health service have to get to this stage for prompt action to be taken?

Many of us could have said that it was not just about secondary care, but about primary care as well. The right hon. Member for Enfield North has made that

point already. I referred to the issue of a tale of two health cities within London. Compared with the Camdens and Islington of this world, we are very much the poor relations. We are 25% poor. We have had meetings with Ministers about mental health provision, and we have pressed the Minister about the need to ensure fair funding for London. We must get that. We have got this sustainability and transformation plan. It is another siren call. There will be other problems down the line on mental health and other issues affecting our constituents unless the Government and NHS England London ensure that we get fair funding.

The Government have put in a new fair funding formula, but it is taking far too long. We do not need to listen to the Public Accounts Committee to tell us it is taking too long—we can listen to patients, to this debate now and to the regulators. Although in the round our health economy is not all about resources, they have a big impact, particularly in primary care. Why does the health trust have to go through a financial penalty system? Another £130,000 was taken away in April, so more money is taken away from the system when there is a cry for help.

The chief executive, who has gone on leave or has left, made a plea for help over many years. We were all making a plea for help. Why has the NHS not done more about it? It is totally unacceptable for us to be in this position here with this debate. I know from our meetings that the Minister is holding the NHS to the fire now, but why were feet not held to the fire years ago to ensure that people took responsibility? Yes, they could have lost their jobs, but there could have been proper clinical leadership that did not let down our patients in Enfield.

I look forward to the Minister giving us every assurance that there is, as I believe there is, a long-term sustainable future for the A&E at North Middlesex. We cannot afford to lose it and I am sure we will not. The CQC tells us that a corner has been turned, but it was far too long in coming. I want the Minister's assurance on consultants, although I understand there is a national crisis in getting consultants on the ground, particularly in emergency departments. I want to ensure that the Government will fix it to ensure there is every financial incentive for the right number of consultants and middle-grade doctors to come to Enfield to ensure we have the A&E service that our constituents need and deserve.

3.13 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I am grateful to have the opportunity to speak in this debate. The hospital serves almost the entirety of the constituency of Tottenham and has done ever since the closure of the Prince of Wales hospital in my constituency in the 1980s. It is important to emphasise that North Middlesex hospital is located in a strategically essential area. It serves not only the boroughs of Enfield and Haringey, but some of Barnet and Waltham Forest. Many years ago, when I was a Minister for Health, a neighbouring hospital, Whipps Cross, was a general hospital that on occasion struggled considerably with its emergency department, so I cannot emphasise enough that it is critical for the broader health economy of north-east London that the North Middlesex survives, flourishes and does well.

The concern that has been raised in this Chamber is really about how the situation has got to this stage over such a length of time, with so many Members of Parliament ringing alarm bells in a context where all of us have privately said, “We must tread carefully. We don’t want to talk down the hospital.” We say, “The chief exec seems to be...” as we whisper among ourselves. We do not want to talk down the hospital, but it has now got to the point at which we have to be absolutely frank about what has been happening at that trust, as we have heard, and we must ask some very hard questions about what has been going on.

I hope that the Minister will assist me on this point. There have been successive risk summits, meetings have been held, and the chief exec has asked for support, but I am not clear why support was not provided. In the old days, Members of Parliament would have been able to contact the strategic health authority and there would have been a clear line of leadership. We literally had two bodies to deal with: the strategic health authority and the chief executive of the trust. Frankly, chief executives went if they were not up to the job, and emergency teams were brought in to run the hospital. I did that as a Minister responsible for emergency care. I saw it happen in a range of trusts across the country as, under the Tony Blair Government, we pushed for the first targets of four-hour waits. I am struggling to understand how things have got to this level.

Life expectancy in a constituency such as mine is among the lowest in the country: men reach 74, six years behind the average life expectancy. We have homelessness and we have had two riots in a generation. The issues are clear, but what is not clear is who was in strategic charge? Why were meetings held in successive years? What is the role of NHS Improvement? Is it ever the case that anyone there would contact a Member of Parliament to say what they are doing to improve a trust? What is the role of NHS England’s London office? The individuals there are paid a hell of a lot of money—hundreds of thousands of pounds. Have they got a responsibility to contact a Member of Parliament to ask for a meeting or a conference call to speak to us about what is happening in the trust?

What is the role of Health Education England, which has been concerned about training and qualifications? We know the role of the General Medical Council, but has it been nobbled not to withdraw doctors by NHS England or any other body? What we have are numerous quangos. I have not even mentioned the clinical commissioning group. We have CCGs, HEE, NHS Improvement, NHS England London and the chief executive. The Government came into office determined to reduce the number of bureaucrats, but—my God!—each of us has at least 10 or 12. Then there are all the staff that work under them. Meetings have been held, but what has been done?

I have done the Minister’s job, so I feel for him. When I did his job, we did a lot of the running of the NHS from Whitehall. The Minister’s party came in and I understand why they said they could not run it from Whitehall, but we now have all these bodies and I am not clear what they have done. As a former Minister, I want to hear more of what they have been up to. I hope that the Minister will answer the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan). Given that there have been CQC reports—the

one that we had on the 6th is not the first—and risk summits, what is the obligation to inform Members of Parliament and therefore our constituents? At what point does that kick in? Or is it expected that that should be done solely by the trust? If it is, that is problematic if it is a failing trust in which the chief executive has been put on emergency leave. I have the CQC report before me and it says that safety at the hospital is inadequate, and so is responsiveness. As to whether it is well led—leadership is also inadequate, which is presumably why the chief executive has been put on emergency leave. Overall the hospital is inadequate. Under the headings of caring and effectiveness, it requires improvement. That is pretty damning. It does not get much worse than that.

Many hon. Members are concerned—and my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and I certainly are, having been around for a few years. We campaigned to get the PFI that put millions—I think it was £150 million—into building a brand new hospital. It is therefore deeply frustrating that we now have such an uphill struggle. Chase Farm has been mentioned and I will not discuss it again, but the Minister will recognise that we all rang alarm bells about the implications of closing emergency there. Money was put into the trust; yet it has got to its present situation.

I heard yesterday about the case of Mrs Alice Morfett, a 92-year-old lady who still went shopping in Morrisons. She had a heart operation in Barts and she was recuperating on the T3 ward. In the morning she told her daughter about her concern about a male nurse’s behaviour; she could not understand why he kept wanting to touch her chest. Her daughter said she did not believe Mrs Morfett and thought the anaesthetic had not worn off, but her mother complained about the nurse rubbing against her chest. After that Mrs Morfett was scared to ask for help. No one was summoned to help her. The next day, after an hour of asking for someone to take her to the toilet, Mrs Morfett tried to get out of bed herself and she fell. She ended up with huge open wounds; my constituent sent me a photo of the terrible wounds her mother suffered. Mrs Morfett died a couple of weeks later, and her daughter believes that she died as a result of her injuries. Mrs Morfett said to her daughter, “Please don’t let them get away with it; they have to pay for what they’ve done to me.” I do not lightly raise constituency case work in this way. I have used this letter because it is the latest one I have in a stream of letters from constituents about what is happening in the trust.

Joan Ryan: Such incidents are what the CQC calls “never” events because they should never happen: a patient dies, and it is not necessarily from medical issues or natural causes. I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that the CQC report notes that one patient lay dead in a cubicle for four and a half hours last December because there were not enough doctors even to do the hourly rounds. It does not get much worse than that.

Mr Lammy: No, it does not, and that cuts to the critical issue of safety at the hospital. In fact, the problems at the hospital have been going on for well over two years. What happened to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate, who lay in the hospital with a burst appendix and who frankly would not be here but for a

[Mr Lammy]

stroke of luck, says it all. How have we got to the situation where the local Member of Parliament is about to die of a medical emergency after waiting without being seen for 11 hours? He has been friendly—*[Interruption.]* Well, that is what happens with a burst appendix. The hon. Gentleman is looking well, but he is not that young. People die of a burst appendix if they are not treated.

Mr Burrowes: Perhaps it is an issue of profile, but they did not know I was the Member of Parliament. I kept it quiet and was there as an ordinary patient—which is the point. It was only when they found out 11 hours on, following some communication that I was the Member of Parliament, that, lo and behold, the seniors all came down and had a look, and saw what was going on. It was actually my mother who was banging on the desk saying, “Why aren’t you getting a scan for my son?” That is what it takes—it is the ordinary experience of any patient, who, sadly, may not have their mother there to badger the staff for them. That is the patient safety concern.

Mr Lammy: The hon. Gentleman took the business of mystery shopping a little far, but his encounter was well reported locally, and at that time alarm bells were being rung. By my recollection it was a good couple of years ago.

The CQC report confirms what we all long feared—that the closure of the emergency department at Chase Farm hospital in December 2013 had a significant impact on demand at North Middlesex hospital. Concerns were also raised about doctors training in anaesthetics, and they were removed from training in the hospital in April 2015, and have never returned to it because the GMC was so concerned. I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health on 22 March—four months ago. I did not get a reply. I am grateful to have seen the Minister eventually, a couple of weeks ago; but he can see why I am concerned when, after failures of the kind we have heard about in the debate, the Secretary of State did not reply to me in March. I will gently say that a hospital where alarm bells are ringing about such issues would have commanded the attention of the Secretary of State in the past, under successive Governments. Certainly MPs and local authority leaders would have been called together and the issue would have been addressed. I raise the matter in the gentlest of ways, because I am concerned about it.

Many issues have been raised and other hon. Members want to contribute; and we want to hear from the shadow Minister, too. The bottom line is that we are very concerned that the hospital has reached the state it has, given the investment that has gone into it. Week after week there are complaints from constituents. Yes, the leadership has now changed. It is important that local governance and the hospital’s relationship with Enfield and the London Borough of Haringey should be retained; but we want to hear from the Minister that such things cannot happen again. It is a question of who is accountable, and when, and of how Members of Parliament could have been heard much more constructively. Given all that happened at Mid Staffordshire, it is a matter of deep concern that although things are clearly

not quite at that stage, they could have reached it had leaks not been published in *The Guardian* and had MPs such as my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Kate Osamor) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North not rung alarm bells as they have in the past few weeks.

3.27 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on securing the debate. It feels a bit like mark 2 for her, I think, given the earlier experiences with Chase Farm. I am pleased about the cross-party nature of the debate; it was interesting to hear the personal experience of the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) of care at the hospital.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), I am at a loss; I attended the annual general meeting a couple of weeks ago and have written letters to Ministers—indeed, the Minister present today has been kind enough to have a meeting with us. We have had press reports and urgent questions. We have asked questions at Prime Minister’s questions. We have had Adjournment debates, and the Mayor of London has raised the matter with NHS London. I am at a loss to know what we should do next, and which levers can be pulled.

I am pleased that management action has been taken, and that Mr Sloman has now taken an interest and is the accountable officer. I am equally pleased that Ms McManus has been brought in to take over on an emergency basis while the leadership of the hospital is being looked at. However, I have concerns for the long term about a situation in which decision makers in Hampstead would make decisions about a north London hospital whose area is Edmonton, Tottenham, Wood Green, Enfield and Haringey. I am concerned about how remote and out of touch they might be. I look forward to hearing in the spring what the management arrangements will be for the medium to long term. We must ensure that there is proper representation of local people at board level and a proper voice for our area in the hospital management and governance structure.

I will briefly raise two constituency cases. One is about medicines training, which was referred to in the Care Quality Commission’s report. I understand from a constituent that when her father was discharged from the hospital, somehow his name had got mixed up with another patient’s name, and when she got home she had the incorrect medicine for him. That is a basic error, and the wrong medicine could have been fatal for an elderly and frail man.

The second case arose after an anonymous phone call to my office reporting on the condition of an elderly patient. The caller was very distressed, as the patient was his elderly wife. He said, “I’m so worried to tell you, because I am afraid that they actually might kill her if I tell you her name.” There is a level of desperation, and that call was made not so long ago; it was within the last month.

There are some general lessons to be learned from this specific situation about the lack of leadership and lack of quality control in our public services. The first is about the recruitment and retention of properly qualified

staff. We desperately need to tackle the low morale of staff, which has been exacerbated by the poor handling of the junior doctors dispute. Morale is low not only at senior level or consultant level but at the middle level, and even at the level of junior doctors. Once the hospital lost the contract for the training of junior doctors, everything went downhill from there. We need to get that training back, and we need to work very hard and very quickly to get back the doctors and experts who want to serve, learn and train in a university hospital.

The second lesson to learn is about the crucial issues in our health economy, one of which is the problems with primary care. I understand that there are immense problems with the current Enfield primary care arrangements. The clinical commissioning group is not in a good place. I would like to hear about any associated issues, and I would like to know what levers the Minister can pull to ensure that proper primary care arrangements are put in place for Enfield and that primary care in Haringey is strengthened.

I understand that Haringey has done some very good things, including putting some extra general practitioners into the accident and emergency department to educate people about where to go when they first come into hospital, and about how they can go and see their GP in the local community. I would be happy to hear about an evaluation of that programme and whether it has been helpful. Rather than rushing in with a band-aid solution, can we hear back about that programme? What has the evaluation been, and what do the experts think? Has that programme stopped the flow of people coming—perhaps incorrectly—to A&E, and has it helped the primary care health economy?

It is well known that Members including my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham secured a debate in the main Chamber on mental health in Haringey. At St Ann's hospital in Haringey, the acute care places are really overloaded, which has led to greater demand for beds at North Middlesex hospital. Once the health economy becomes unbalanced, that can put more strain on A&E departments from general patients who do not have mental health problems.

Furthermore, there is an ambulance crisis. Police officers have told me that there are not enough ambulances and that they have to take patients to the North Middlesex hospital themselves because the ambulances cannot cope. Of course, we know that once the ambulances get to hospital, people are being treated inside the ambulances, which is completely unacceptable.

Mr Lammy: My hon. Friend will also appreciate that a major criticism in the CQC report was that after patients have left the ambulance, they are treated solely by nurses at grade 5, with no doctors in sight and no consultants available after 11 o'clock at night. How can there be an emergency department when there are no consultants available on a Friday or Saturday night?

Catherine West: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point about an issue that must be monitored. I look forward to the Minister reporting back on the lack of the leadership and clinical excellence that we expect on behalf of our constituents.

The cuts to public health provision will have an extra impact. I will give just one example, which many Members here have pursued—basic HIV/AIDS care. We are not

doing the preventive work, and we are unnecessarily cutting back the public health budget, which will eventually lead to more people turning up at A&E or acute care departments in crisis. These issues in the health economy are all linked, and we need to do much more about all of them.

We are all aware that litigation accounts for a quarter of NHS expenditure. Why do we not get better at doing the proper work first, so that the money we spend on lawyers and expensive court cases when we get things wrong does not add up to so much? The situation is absolutely desperate. We need more investment, and we need to stop making mistakes so that we do not have to pay for litigation and so that instead of litigation there can be front-loading of resources into prevention, mental health and good-quality primary care and basic services. People accessing the NHS could then have confidence that their local service is as good as we should expect it to be.

Finally, we know that in London, there are a number of issues with the cost of living, the cost of transport and the cost of childcare for medical practitioners and nursing staff. Those issues are linked to the others that I have mentioned, and I would like to see a more robust approach from the NHS around London to the needs of those working in our hospitals and our public services. London is not like other areas, where it is cheaper to rent homes and so on. We are unable to recruit the medical practitioners and nurses we need because they cannot afford to live in the area, and we should examine that issue more energetically and not just in a theoretical way.

Thank you very much, Ms Vaz, for calling me to speak. I look forward to hearing the Minister's conclusions.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): I point out to the Front-Bench spokespersons that the wind-ups are starting now, and we are expecting a Division in the House at around ten to 4.

3.36 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) on securing the debate and giving a masterful summation of the situation.

There have been some important speeches today, including from the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West). I also note the presence of my hon. Friends the Members for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) and for Edmonton (Kate Osamor).

This debate is about more than an individual hospital such as Central Middlesex or North Middlesex. There are certain underlying issues, which I will touch on. One source of pressure on an accident and emergency department—whether it is in the North Middlesex hospital, the Central Middlesex hospital or any other hospital around London—is what is happening in social care. For years, local authorities, both Labour and Conservative, have said that they are struggling to meet social care need, and studies show that many of the people who turn up at A&E would not have to go there in the middle of the night to get the care they need if the social care system was functioning properly.

[*Ms Diane Abbott*]

There is also the difficulty of getting GP appointments. The level of difficulty may vary from constituency to constituency, but in the City and Hackney area, for quite a long time now—for years, in fact—it has taken two weeks to get a GP appointment. I am afraid that means that many of my constituents take it upon themselves to go to A&E, because they know that, however long they wait there, they will ultimately be seen. Another problem is the lack of investment in public health, which could deal with some of the health conditions that people turn up to A&E with.

There is also the issue of alcohol abuse. On a Saturday night, too many people are in A&E as a consequence of alcohol abuse, and we must consider how we can deal with those cases and stop A&E departments being filled up.

On the issue of staff recruitment, I am not seeking to be particularly party political, but I cannot believe that the junior doctors dispute will make it easier to recruit staff. One thing that was manifest in the junior doctors' refusal of a contract that the British Medical Association had recommended to them was the complete collapse in morale among doctors, and that will be reflected in the difficulty of recruiting staff.

Part of the problem with outer-London hospitals may be the changing demographics of the areas they serve. I said I would not be party political, but I campaigned for many of my right hon. and hon. Friends at the last general election, and I was struck by the situation in areas such as Enfield, Edmonton and parts of Hornsey. When I was a child, those areas were very much leafy suburbia, but now they have a much greater density of population, a much more complex demographic profile and much more complex health and social care needs.

As shadow Secretary of State for Health, I hope to look at that issue further. We should remember that outer London does not have many socially connected teaching hospitals such as those that exist in inner London. I am not sure whether the level of funding that outer-London areas get reflects the demographic and social changes in those areas that I have seen in my lifetime.

It is easy to talk about the issue abstractly, and to talk about reports and hieroglyphics, but it is about people. The tragedy at North Middlesex is a tragedy for patients. Who would want their mother to be dead on a trolley for four and a half hours and have no one come to look for her?

We also have to think about staff morale. People have congratulated the staff but, strikingly, the unpublished Health Education England report, for which 24 members of staff were anonymously interviewed, said that some doctors found working in the A&E unit so stressful that they cried when they finished their shifts. It stated:

“Foundation doctors had been reduced to tears by the sheer volume of patients they had to deal with, for example 200 patients and a six-hour wait, and they felt that they regularly had to send children home without having discussed their case with anyone senior... They often finished their shift and returned home full of anxiety that they had not been able to provide care at an appropriate level.”

This is about the patients and their families, but it is also about the staff who know that they are not providing the right level of care and are demoralised and upset.

As my right hon. and hon. Friends and the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate have reminded us, we are told that North Middlesex is implementing a safer, faster, better programme to bring down waiting times and address the issues in the Care Quality Commission's report. As the hon. Gentleman said, why should there have to be a shiny new programme to ensure that our constituents get safe, fast, high-quality treatment? It is good to hear that a new A&E clinical director—Turan Huseyin from Barnet A&E—has been appointed, and that there is a new A&E nursing lead and five additional middle-grade doctors and consultants on loan from other London trusts. It is also good to hear that in July the Care Quality Commission said that although North Middlesex was still inadequate, it had “turned a corner”.

I want to raise a few points with the Minister. One, which has already been made today, is that what happened could have been foreseen. The drop in both standards and performance at North Middlesex is intimately tied up with the closure of the A&E at Chase Farm in 2014. Members who are here today raised that point at the time. I would also like to hear from the Minister about how much support is being given to the emergency care intensive support team. In response to a parliamentary question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham we heard that the trust had requested such support, so what is happening?

My final point is about doctors being kept in the dark. I want to avoid crudely party political points, but I spent three years in the Opposition health team dealing with the health Bill, and we were concerned about transparency and accountability. When there is a crisis in a hospital, despite all the different organisations that my right hon. Friend told us about, there seems to be no simple method of ensuring accountability to local representatives, and therefore to local people. Something is lacking in accountability, and we need to consider that. The fact that the collapsing performance at North Middlesex hospital was an open secret among the health service professionals but none of my hon. Friends knew about it—except anecdotally from constituents—is alarming.

This is about more than North Middlesex. There are systemic issues. There might be a systemic issue with NHS funding failing to keep up with changes in local demographics, and there is a systemic issue in social care. I am sure we will return to that in this Chamber, because local authorities have been flagging it up for some years now.

In closing, I can only repeat what the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate asked: how bad does it have to get? It is troubling if our constituents, who pay their taxes and rates, cannot get a basic level of care when they go to A&E. For most of them, that is their engagement with hospital care. They are getting almost a third-world service. I do not say that lightly—someone being on a trolley for four and a half hours after they have died, and there being only one commode between 100 people, is more like a third-world than a first-world standard of healthcare. How bad does it have to get? Will the Minister assure us that we will not have a situation again in which a collapsing service at a major hospital is an open secret within the professional health services but not made apparent to Members of Parliament and the wider community?

3.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I thank the right hon. and hon. Members who have given such thoughtful, considered, well-researched and knowledgeable speeches, and also the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) who provided such a thoughtful reflection from the shadow Front Bench. Members will be pleased to know that I agree with much of what they have said. I will come on to how I think the NHS has let Members and their constituents down and what we will do to try to fix the situation.

If Members do not mind, I will first set the issue in a bit of context. North Middlesex hospital was classed by the Care Quality Commission as requiring improvement for reasons that have been mentioned. The quality of care was not consistent enough and there were concerns about patient safety. It was not one of the worst hospitals in London, or in the country, but it was certainly not one of the best. Until July 2015, it was largely meeting its institutional standards. The 95% waiting time target for A&E was being met most months, even though the department is one of the larger ones in the capital, and in spite of the reorganisations that were discussed at length by the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan).

We need to be careful, therefore, with causality, and I will not give a definitive reason why the problems came about. A direct connection between the reorganisation of Chase Farm, which began under the Government before the coalition, and the problems experienced at North Middlesex over the past year, cannot be made with great surety because the hospital was dealing with the A&E caseload within the required timelines, albeit with a standard of care that was not at the level it should have been.

Nor is this about money. It is important to point out that organisations across the NHS, as the shadow Minister knows well, have reported deficits in the past year and this is one of the smaller ones. The posts that are established in the hospital are fully funded; the problem is trying to get the right people into them. I do not deny that the hospital has a staffing problem—I will come on to that in a second—but it is not connected with funding.

Let us get to the core cause of the problems that Members have noticed and brought to the attention of the House. I am afraid that I am not able to give a complete answer at this stage, but Members are entirely right to ask why this happened. We need a better explanation. This morning, I agreed with officials and NHS England that we will look in detail at the reasons within the hospital why the performance standards slipped so significantly in the middle of last year, and why the training routines and practices slipped as well. That is the first part of the review.

The second part is on why the system did not react with the speed it needed to when concerns were first expressed about a year ago. Here, I offer an apology to Members on behalf of NHS organisations. Members were not informed at the pace and the time they should have been, and for that I offer regret. Members are right to say that they should have been the first to know there were problems so that they could properly represent their constituents and hold local leaders to account.

I offer that apology within the context of a much better story across the NHS of what happens when hospitals fail. A warning notice was issued—that was the first reason that the right hon. Member for Enfield North knew something was going wrong—because of a change to the law under the coalition Government in 2014 on when the CQC was able to issue warning notices.

Ms Abbott: Will the Minister give way?

Ben Gummer: I will in a second. The whole system of CQC Ofsted-style inspection ratings, which are designed to be user-friendly so that non-clinicians can understand how well hospitals are performing, was instituted by the Secretary of State because we wanted to shine a light on the performance and quality of care in hospitals. Through two and a half years of having special measures routines and regimes for hospitals, we have a much better understanding of why things go wrong and can put them right far more quickly. Most importantly, we have a process for engaging Members of Parliament right at the beginning. That did not happen in this instance, and I will explain why after I have taken the right hon. Lady's intervention.

Ms Abbott: The Minister may be coming to this, but I wanted to ask who Members should look to inform them of a catastrophic drop in standards. They should not have to wait for the CQC to issue a warning.

Ben Gummer: Ideally, if things are going wrong and that has been noted within the hospital, the hospital chief executive or commissioners should inform local people, but in the past—and over the two and a half to three years since we instituted the special measures regime—it has taken a Care Quality Commission investigation to highlight poor standards of care so inadequate that the hospital needs to be placed under special measures. At that point, before the public are informed, Members of Parliament are informed by the CQC and what was Monitor and the Trust Development Authority, but is now NHS Improvement.

Joan Ryan rose—

Ben Gummer: Before I take the right hon. Lady's intervention, I will explain why Members were not informed, and it is by no means an excuse. The core problem around emergency medicine and paediatrics was to do with the training places and the relationship between the General Medical Council, which looks at and regulates the quality of training, Health Education England and NHS Improvement. Because this case did not go through the traditional special measures route, which is governed by the CQC and NHS Improvement, things did not happen at the pace I would have expected and nor were Members talked to when they should have been.

The first thing I want to ensure, once we have receipt of the review I asked for this morning, is that we have a similar standard approach, were this to happen again. We have to assume that it might, because things in a large system do go wrong. We need to learn from this scenario over the past year, where Members have been let down, and ensure that it does not happen again. We can move with greater celerity and ensure that Members are informed at the earliest possible opportunity.

Joan Ryan: I appreciate the Minister's expression of regret and his acknowledgement that something went badly wrong, but I take issue. A CQC report in 2014 noted added pressures in A&E that we are all aware of. I only came back into Parliament in May 2015, and over the past year a number of Members, including me, have raised the issue several times in the Chamber. We were given no information. The CQC report is very welcome, but for it to take more than three months to be published means it is of no use as a warning note with any detail. *[Interruption.]*

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Before the Minister responds, there is a Division.

Ben Gummer: May I respond to the right hon. Lady before we suspend?

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): I do not know how long the Minister wants.

Ben Gummer: I will be 20 seconds, and then we can come back for part 2.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Okay.

Ben Gummer: I will answer the right hon. Lady directly. Of course there is more to do, but we are much further ahead than 10 years ago. There is no blame on any particular Government—we are further ahead than 20 or 30 years ago. The Care Quality Commission is a respected regulator that comes down with tough judgments and makes Members aware. When we come back after the Division, I will explain what we will do.

3.55 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.10 pm

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

On resuming—

Ben Gummer: I promised to explain to the House what we will do to correct the situation. There are two parts to this. First, the short-term rescue plan has been put in place by Health Education England, NHS England and NHS Improvement, with the approval of the General Medical Council, to ensure resilience in the A&E department and for paediatric services. Two consultants have gone on secondment to the department, and a further five are coming this month. The GMC is happy that that will provide the rota resilience we need in the short term.

If we think that will fix things, however, we will quickly end up in the same situation. That is why we need to look at a far more robust plan for the next few years, so that the North Middlesex can become the centre of excellence that hon. Members and I certainly want it to be. A new improvement director will be in place to deliver an improvement plan, which I will ensure is shared with hon. Members. So the plan that the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) requested will be available for other hon. Members to see. It will have the transparency that has been lacking so far.

I must answer a particular point made by the right hon. Gentleman about the General Medical Council. I do not think that it was silenced in any way. Genuinely, this is more muck-up than conspiracy, and I hope that it will not be repeated, as I have already assured hon. Members.

On the long-term plan, the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington was entirely right: the North Middlesex is like many hospitals on the periphery of London, which not only are seeing rapid demographic change, but suffer from the fact that they are not the attractive training places that the central London hospitals are—we have to be blunt about that. I think that is wrong, because many of the challenges that aspiring doctors want are in those hospitals, which are diverse with an extraordinary range of clinical conditions. However, because of the history of the NHS, which I cannot change, a glamour is attached to the central metropolitan hospitals, and that causes challenges for district general hospitals throughout the country, as well as those on the periphery of London.

I want to change that, but we cannot do it by fiddling around. That is why I am excited by the link-up with the Royal Free. That kind of branding, which the right hon. Member for Enfield North pointed to, the strong leadership, which will provide stability, and, I hope, the ability to move consultants and senior nursing points around—some people recruited already into the Royal London and Barts will also work at the North Middlesex—will result in the diversity of career opportunities necessary to attract the kind of clinicians that the right hon. Lady and her colleagues have requested for their hospital.

Mr Lammy: To press the Minister on a bit of detail, the CQC's press release stated:

"We have strongly encouraged the trust to engage with other organisations across the local health and social care system to resolve this challenging issue...there are moves to appoint more senior doctors—and I note that the trust is calling on consultants from other departments within the hospital to provide the routine daily support to A and E which is so badly needed."

That was on 6 July and, clearly, the CQC did not feel that the hospital had got there. Will the Minister therefore confirm what the required number is? If he cannot tell us that, it would be helpful for him to come back to us. What is the golden number that should comfort us? Will he also confirm, because this is important, that nurses are not still reviewing patients who arrive by ambulance, because that is seriously inadequate, and we want to ensure that patients are seen by doctors?

Ben Gummer: I reassure the right hon. Gentleman that NHS England has a live rota stream from the hospital to give it the reassurance that every single junior doctor has a consultant supervisor in place at all times—precisely to ensure that the reported lapses of supervision do not recur. When the right hon. Gentleman meets the chief inspector at the CQC tomorrow, I hope that he hears something similar to what I have heard: things are not good, but they are better than they were, and the trajectory is in the right direction.

Nevertheless, we will not fix this without looking at fundamental reform of local health services, which requires changes to primary care, of the kind that we discussed when I met local Members of Parliament last week. I hope to meet them again, in a few weeks or

months, and to be able to talk about progress and the plans for the future, so that right hon. and hon. Members will be satisfied that things are getting better at the North Middlesex.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): I thank the Minister—my constituents in Broxbourne will be following the outcome of this debate closely.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the performance of North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust.

Free Childcare for 3 and 4-year-olds

4.15 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered free childcare for three and four year-olds.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I am grateful for the opportunity to hold this important debate, the background to which is the Government's plan to double the number of hours of free childcare that working families with three and four-year-olds are entitled to from 15 to 30 hours per week from September 2017. Pilots are due to begin this September. That builds on the introduction six years ago of an entitlement to 15 hours' free childcare per week, which, in 2013, was extended to include two-year-olds from disadvantaged families.

There are matters on which I profoundly disagree with the Government, but I firmly believe that when their record meets the needs of people in my constituency, credit is due. I very much welcome the Department's good progress towards ensuring that all three and four-year-olds benefit from 15 hours of free early education and childcare. In 2015, 94% of three-year-olds and 99% of four-year-olds had taken up a funded place.

My work on the Public Accounts Committee has helped further develop my understanding of a range of issues, and childcare is no exception. The Committee's recent inquiry and subsequent report—a copy of which I have with me, in case the Minister has not managed to peruse it in detail—helped me in this area. The report's conclusions and recommendations are numerous, but probably chief among them is the danger that the Government may not deliver on their pledge to extend the childcare offer.

I will highlight some specific concerns. They fall into four main areas: the availability of quality information for parents; workforce planning and the supply of enough qualified early years staff; the high cost of childcare in some areas, and what I call “reverse means-testing”; and monitoring the impact to ensure value for taxpayers' money, which is very much what the Public Accounts Committee's work is about.

The first of those four areas is the availability of quality information for parents about the childcare available close to where they live. I have welcomed the Government's progress on free childcare, but there are concerns throughout the House about unacceptable local variations in the amount of information that is available to parents about access to free childcare.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): My hon. Friend is making an important speech. I recently met members of the Rochdale branch of the National Day Nurseries Association, who had real concerns about provision and the low funding available for places, to the point where they thought that they would not be able to make the provision. They also have concerns about things like quality and who will pay for meals. Does she share the concern of those businesses?

Karin Smyth: I do. In the Public Accounts Committee, we have found that the situation varies across the country, and many hon. Members will be able to tell the Minister about their local experience. I will discuss quality later.

[*Karin Smyth*]

Local authorities have to provide the family information service, which gives parents details not only about childcare providers that offer free entitlement but about how to claim it. I know from my own constituents that navigating the processes can be as big a barrier to claiming entitlements as knowledge of the offer itself. That extends, incidentally, to other entitlements such as pension credit and income support.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an important contribution. The challenges are multifaceted. A couple of weeks ago I met the YMCA, which runs a local nursery, and it told me that it felt that some local authorities take very high administration charges when it comes to allocating per-pupil funding to children in their care. Does she agree that local authorities need to do all they can to ensure that free childcare is spread as widely as possible?

Karin Smyth: I do, and I will come on to the need for local authorities to abide by the statutory direction given by the Government. That was one point that the Public Accounts Committee picked up on.

Information for people in my constituency is generally good. We have 1 Big Database, a searchable database of 1,000 childcare providers that is a collective effort of Bristol, Bath and North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire Councils and enables parents to locate the providers nearest to their home or workplace, although it lists only provision, not vacancies. However, it is clear that the quality of information varies between authorities nationwide. Shockingly, the Public Accounts Committee heard that only 30% of parents are even aware of family information services. If there is an offer but most of those who are eligible for it do not know about it or how to access it, its value is diluted to say the least. I hope that the Minister will outline how his Department will improve the quality and consistency of information for parents.

My second area of concern is workforce planning. As a former governor of a nursery and children's centre, I recognise the importance and difficulties for providers of such planning. The Public Accounts Committee found that the Department lacked robust plans to ensure that there are enough qualified early years staff for providers to continue offering high-quality childcare. The sector has become increasingly professional, and there has been an increase in graduate recruits. That raises quality but brings challenges for providers, which now report that they are struggling to recruit. As the Department has set funding rates until 2019-20 based on 2014-15 costs, many providers are also concerned about the impact of the national living wage on their costs. The Department does not have a workforce plan for the early years sector.

There are also concerns that there is a real risk to the delivery of the pledge to provide 15 additional free hours from September 2017, due to too few providers being able to deliver that pledge because many will be minded not to become involved in the offer. I find that alarming, and it raises serious questions about the process of making pledges when deliverability appears not to have been properly assessed.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): The hon. Lady is making some powerful arguments. I point out to her that one of the pilot schemes is in York. I have worked closely with the nursery providers in my constituency. Because of the funding stream and the hourly rates, there was a lot of concern among those providers to start off with about whether they would opt in to provide the second 15 hours, but the local authority and the Department for Education worked together closely and have now persuaded 60% to 70% of those providers to opt into the scheme. Does she not agree that we can persuade providers to opt in as long as there is good will from the Department and local authorities to deliver the scheme?

Karin Smyth: I certainly agree. That shows the importance of good pilots and good working nationally and locally, and we want to see that with the other pilots, which will start this year.

Private and voluntary providers reported to the Public Accounts Committee that the amount they are currently paid for providing free childcare is not enough to cover their costs, so in some cases they feel the need to charge parents for additional hours or obtain other sources of income to meet those costs. Providers can of course choose whether to offer parents free childcare, so there is a genuine risk that many businesses will simply choose not to offer the new entitlement because doing so could reduce their opportunity to charge parents for hours outside the entitlement. As hon. Members have said, it is important for that issue to be looked at, because different situations exist across the country.

Maintained settings—nursery classes and nurseries run by schools—tend to operate fixed morning or afternoon sessions and are less likely to offer additional chargeable hours, so their ability to offer the new entitlement is limited. That disproportionately affects children in disadvantaged areas, simply because those settings are more likely to operate in such areas. I hope the Minister will be able to outline how the Department will address the challenges of ensuring that there are enough people with the right skills to work in the sector in the years ahead. I also hope that he can reassure me that the Department will be able to use the pilots that will begin this year to test providers' capacity to meet the expected demand for the increased entitlement. He may also want to explain how that will be done and how evaluation will be carried out, given that there is just 12 months between the start of the pilots and the scheduled full roll-out of the new entitlement, and I would welcome his thoughts on how the Department will ensure prior to the 2017 roll-out that the pilots have had genuine influence.

My third area of concern is the high cost of childcare. I know from my constituency that childcare fees present a real challenge for many working parents, as I am sure many hon. Members will agree. I have been contacted by parents who have been informed of some quite significant fee increases—up to 30%—being imposed by their private nurseries. Bristol already has some of the most expensive childcare outside London, as the Bristol Women's Forum has highlighted, and I agree with the forum that childcare is an infrastructure issue and needs to be considered as part of our economic thinking. Indeed, the Women's Budget Group in Bristol

has indicated that 84% of the cost of universal free childcare will be recouped through taxes and reduction in welfare benefits.

High childcare fees are a key reason why the offer of 30 free hours is so important to so many working families and why I support that offer, but many parents have reported that some providers are offering the free entitlement only if parents also pay for the additional hours, and the charity Gingerbread receives calls from parents whose childcare providers have put conditions on the free offer. That contravenes the Department's statutory guidance for local authorities, which states that they should ensure that

“if providers charge for any goods or services, this is not a condition of children accessing their place.”

The Department has acknowledged that issue, and I hope that the Minister will be able to explain what progress is being made on identifying the scale of the problem and how the Department plans to address it to ensure that those who are least able to pay do not miss out through such reverse means-testing.

My fourth and final area of concern is about measuring the impact of the offer to ensure that the taxpayer is getting value for money, which is why the Public Accounts Committee held an inquiry on this subject. As someone who is passionate about the value of investing in early years—I am a firm believer in the Labour Government's Sure Start programme, for example—I am concerned that the Department's most recent evaluations of the effectiveness of early years education and childcare are based on the academic outcomes of children who started early years education in 1997. I was surprised and alarmed to find that the Department had no routine data to assess the impact of its investment in the early years. That must be remedied, since such data must play a key role in helping to shape future policy. If the Department does not know what works well and how to get the best bang for its buck, taxpayers could be left short-changed. Since the Department appears to lack sufficient current data to measure the impact of free childcare, I hope the Minister will be able to explain, along with his responses to the other issues that I have raised, the steps that he is taking to bring its assessments up to date.

4.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): I thank the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) for securing this important debate. Successful implementation of the extended free childcare offer is a key priority for the Government. Childcare was included in the Queen's Speech for the first time after the last election, and the Childcare Act 2016 shows how much of a priority our manifesto pledge on childcare is for the Government.

At a time when there is austerity and a lot of other Departments face budget cuts, the Government have made a strategic decision to continue to invest in childcare, as a result of which an extra £1 billion investment will be made in the three and four-year-old offer from 2019-20, taking the amount going into the early years free entitlement to £6 billion a year. That is more than we have ever spent on childcare in this country. I reassure the hon. Lady that delivering on our pledge continues to be a high priority for the Government, and the

passage of the 2016 Act shows that we are well on our way to turning that pledge into a full commitment for parents.

The hon. Lady mentioned the availability of information for parents about the offer. The high take-up rates for current three and four-year-olds indicates that parents are already highly aware of the free entitlement, but it is worth mentioning that we are not necessarily increasing demand but extending an offer. A lot of parents already use 30 or more hours of free childcare. The Government offer encourages those who do not get it to do so, but those who are already using the 30 hours of free childcare will get a subsidy from the Government rather than having to pay for it all themselves.

That principle is particularly important to understand because a lot of the criticism of the 30-hour entitlement, whether it is about workforce, places or whatever, seems to assume that somehow no parent in the market is already taking 30 hours of childcare and that, suddenly, from 2017 every parent will do that. The truth is a lot of parents already take more than the free 15 hours of childcare. By giving them an extra 15 hours, the Government are subsidising the additional hours they buy. We are therefore not necessarily increasing the demand, but extending the entitlement.

That principle is particularly important because it has a bearing on information and how we need to make parents aware of it. A section in the Childcare Act, which the hon. Lady will be aware of, asks local authorities to publicise information about the childcare available in the local area. The new statutory duty in the Act requires local authorities to publish information about childcare services in their local area, which will increase the information available to parents.

We have not stopped there. The Department has provided funding to the largest website in the country on childcare places—childcare.co.uk—to develop an innovative digital solution that will make it easier for parents to find information. Further, in my experience, generally when something that is otherwise quite expensive for people when they pay for it themselves is free, they tend to find out about it. I am very confident that, given the statutory duty, the innovative solutions we are taking and the fact that 98% of four-year-olds and something like 94% of three-year-olds already take 15 hours, parents talking to early years settings will realise that they can get that extended entitlement.

There will be a communications campaign before launch. I chair a cross-Government taskforce with the Minister for Employment, and at the right time we will launch a campaign alongside a new Government website to alert parents. I hope I can assure the hon. Lady that parents will be able to find out about this fantastic offer, delivered by a Conservative Government.

The second issue the hon. Lady raised was about workforce planning. As I said, the Department will launch a workforce strategy later on this year alongside the introduction of the 30-hour commitment. The quality of the workforce is already good and has been improving. Between 2008 and 2013, the proportion of full-day care staff with at least a level 3 qualification—equivalent to A-level study—grew from 75% to 87% and the proportion with a degree or higher increased from 5% to 13%. However, we are not complacent. We want to continue to attract quality staff into the early years and support those already working in the sector to progress. That is

[*Mr Sam Gyimah*]

why we will publish the workforce strategy to which I alluded—it will be on how the sector can attract and retain people. That is something we are focused on.

When the hon. Lady made the point about workforce, she also talked about places, and places in maintained settings in particular. One thing to be aware of when we discuss childcare is that no one size fits all. It is easy for us in Government to think that every parent should do this, but some parents want only the 15 hours of early education for their children. That is free, and they can continue to get it. Some might want 20 hours and some might want 30-plus hours.

The strength of the childcare sector is that there are different providers to deliver different types of childcare. We have full day-care nurseries that deliver all-day childcare; nurseries in schools that, as the hon. Lady mentioned, will do three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon, which are focused on early education; childminders who deliver excellent childcare; and sessional providers operating from, say, church or village halls that offer 15 hours a week.

The strength of the sector is that there is diverse supply to suit different parents' needs, which is important. We should not try to impose one model of childcare on parents. However, for parents who have been using a nursery in a school, for example, that currently offers only the first 15 hours, there is capital available to enable those schools that want to expand their provision to do so. One of the interesting things we have seen in innovative local authorities such as York, as my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) mentioned, is the bringing together of childminders and school nurseries to offer a one-stop shop for parents, so that the child can be in the school nursery for a time and then be picked up by a childminder if that is what works for the parent. We will look for a number of different solutions to be available not just to increase the supply of places but to ensure that parents get the childcare solution that fits their working lives.

Karin Smyth: I am grateful for that assurance. I agree that diversity of provision is important and valuable—I took great advantage of that when my three children were younger. Will the Minister comment on the security of income for providers? Although I do not have data to verify his assertion that the people who take 15 hours are the same as the people who might take 30 hours—I would be interested in such data—income that gives struggling providers security is important. Choice for parents is welcome, but equally providers need security of income.

Mr Gyimah: That is an important and relevant question. We want the childcare sector to be sustainable and we want providers to be able to deliver this offer. That is why in November we published the most comprehensive review of the cost of childcare ever. In order for the Government—we will become the biggest buyer of childcare in the UK—to set a price for the sector, it made sense for us to work out what the unit cost of providing childcare was and set a price that allows providers to deal with increased cost pressures such as the national living wage, which the hon. Lady mentioned, and, given that 80% of the sector is in private and voluntary

settings, to enable the sector to make a profit. That was the purpose of the review, which was described by the National Audit Office as “thorough and wide-ranging.” Those are not the Department’s words, so I hope she is reassured that the detailed work that underpins how we will decide the funding rate for providers is there.

That is what underpinned the spending review settlement. The Government’s commitment of an additional £300 million a year to increase the national average funding rates paid for the free entitlement was based on that research. We are also committing £50 million of capital funding to create an additional 4,000 early years places. More money is going into the system than ever before, but we need to ensure that it is distributed fairly. That is what we saw in York. The issue is not just the quantum of money. Because the funding formula is based on local authorities and history, we have a situation where some local authorities are getting £9 an hour per child and others are getting something like £3.50 a child. There is therefore no point in increasing the funding pot without reforming how the money is distributed to local authorities and, in turn, how it goes from local authorities to providers.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) for securing this important debate. The Minister has made several references to the need to be sure about such and such, and my hon. Friend mentioned that the full roll-out will take place soon after the pilot, so will the Minister comment on how lessons will be learnt in time for the full roll-out?

Mr Gyimah: What I can say firmly is that the Government will bring about funding reform imminently to create a system that is transparent to local authorities and fair to all early years providers. Part of the package introducing the 30 hours will be wholesale reform of early years funding. That was mentioned in the spending review and the autumn statement, and that reform is imminent. We will consult on that to seek views on our proposals from across the early years sector. We already listen to the sector in a number of other ways to ensure the funding works. Our red tape challenge is looking at bureaucracy and barriers. We have consulted on ensuring that providers are paid on time, which has been raised specifically by childminders in many areas, and on making local authority contracts with providers more consistent across different parts of the country.

We are looking at the local authority role in building on the success of the existing 15-hour entitlement. Rolling out that manifesto commitment is an opportunity to improve the way the system works on the ground. We received over 1,300 responses to our recent consultation on key elements of the operation and delivery of the extended 30-hour free entitlement from a wide range of childcare providers, local authorities and parents. Crucially, those views will help to inform how the 30-hour entitlement will be delivered at local level. We will publish our response to the consultation in the autumn ahead of affirmative debates in the House and the other place on the regulations of the Childcare Act 2016.

I hope I can assure the House first that a record amount of funding is going into the sector. Secondly, in terms of how that funding is distributed, we are looking at wholesale reform and will be publishing our intentions,

on which we will be consulting the sector, imminently. Thirdly, we are looking to reform how local authorities work with providers and will consult on that as well. Much of the disquiet around the 30-hour commitment and its implementation is from a number of people who are assuming that we will be following through with the system as it is, but we are going to reform the entire system to underpin the fact that, if the Government are going to be the biggest buyer of childcare, the old system will not work. That is because it was based on just 15 hours a week, which was a limited offer. If we are to move to 30 hours a week, we need to ensure the system we are operating in is fit for purpose.

The hon. Member for Bristol South also mentioned the high cost of childcare. The Family and Childcare Trust is the guru when it comes to childcare costs. I look forward to its childcare costs report with a degree of trepidation every year because I know I will have to tour the TV studios if the report says the cost of childcare is getting out of control. The most recent report showed that childcare costs, which had risen for the best part of a decade, are stabilising and only rose in line with inflation in 2015.

The principle here, and the reason why the Government are introducing the 30-hour commitment, is precisely to help parents with the cost of childcare, but the available support to parents does not only come in the form of the 30 hours. We will be introducing other childcare measures such as tax-free childcare, which will give parents 20% off the cost of childcare up to £10,000. If they spend £10,000 they will get £2,000 off the cost of childcare, so a parent buying in excess of 30 hours of childcare will get 30 hours free and 20% off for anything over those 30 hours—obviously, that is for three and four-year-olds. Other parents on the lower end of the income scale will get additional support through universal credit.

I hope the hon. Lady will appreciate that a substantial amount of support goes to parents for childcare, but she is right that we need to make it simple for parents. The issue is that there are multiple areas of support for childcare that are parented by different Government Departments and there is a need to stitch those together. That is what the cross-governmental childcare taskforce is looking at, so that parents do not have to go to three or four different places to try to figure out which childcare offer works best for them. There will be one portal and one port of call from which they will be able to access childcare.

The issue of cross-subsidisation was also mentioned and it is particularly important from the provider perspective. A lot of providers have been content with the free 15 hours almost as a lead generation aspect of their business, so parents get 15 hours free and then have to buy additional hours for which the providers can charge a lot more. One of the things the funding reform will specifically look at is to price this in such a way that there is every incentive for providers to actually offer parents free hours, rather than thinking that they will opt out of it. The truth of the matter is that providers do not have to offer that, but parents will be looking around for providers that can. The Government have to set a price that brings the buyers and sellers in that market together and the cost of childcare review gives us a strong basis from which we can and, I am sure, will, get that right when the funding review is published. It is an issue that we are alive to.

Another point is that, with so much subsidy going into the sector—

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Order.

4.45 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No.10(6)).

The Oxford-MK-Cambridge Arc

4.45 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the report by the MK Futures 2050 Commission and developing the Oxford to Milton Keynes to Cambridge arc.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. Before I go into the substance of the debate, I pay warm tribute to the chair of the MK Futures 2050 Commission, Sir Peter Gregson, who is the vice-chancellor of Cranfield University, and his team of commissioners. They have drawn on their wide set of skills and experiences to produce an excellent report. That great care was taken to select commissioners from diverse backgrounds gives considerable weight to their findings, from Lee Shostak, a former director of planning at the old Milton Keynes development corporation, to the ever-inspirational Pete Winkelman, chairman of MK Dons, and to the young entrepreneur and broadcaster Oliver Dean, who spoke for the next generations.

The people behind the report care deeply about the future of Milton Keynes and I pay tribute to them all for their hard work. It is a body of work I have long argued for. I think the title of the report—“Making a Great City Greater”—is apt. I believe the report will be extremely significant in shaping not only the future development of Milton Keynes but of the whole Oxford to Cambridge arc, of which Milton Keynes is the fulcrum.

Before I go on to talk about some of the report’s findings and their implications, let me first put it in some context. The motto of Milton Keynes is highly pertinent—“By knowledge, design and understanding”. Milton Keynes will celebrate its 50th birthday in January, and as we approach that milestone it is worth reflecting on that troika of guiding principles. We certainly have design. Over the past half century we have filled out the urban space that was designed by the original developers and our population now exceeds the original target of 250,000. Throughout that period we have also applied great knowledge and understanding to inspire the design and grow the development of the city. Sometimes mocked by those who have never visited, Milton Keynes is characterised by quality urban design, open green spaces, inclusivity and cultural richness.

“Infrastructure before expansion”—I before E—has been key to our success. We are now expanding beyond the originally designed size of Milton Keynes, both in the physical footprint and in the number of people. In the absence of the report, which was published recently, we had to ask ourselves if we properly understood the factors that had made Milton Keynes a success as we went forward. Going beyond our designed limits has put pressure on infrastructure, which has been crucial in placing Milton Keynes as the most successful and fastest growing new city in the country.

In the previous decade, I contend that John Prescott’s English Partnerships proposals to double the size of Milton Keynes started to break that essential partnership of knowledge, design and understanding. Thankfully, those proposals were scaled back in the 2013 core strategy, which mapped out a more sustainable development of Milton Keynes into the mid and late-2020s. That

strategy is now under threat. Housing developments that have outline permission are not being brought forward sufficiently quickly and place Milton Keynes in danger of not meeting the five-year supply targets.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate, and I join him in congratulating Milton Keynes on its 50th anniversary, which I look forward to celebrating. Does he agree that right across the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford arc, which he rightly says has such enormous potential, we need not only to provide additional affordable housing but to take the opportunity to show how economic expansion and growth, notably in public and other transport links, can be an agent of improving the environment and the sustainability of the ecology and biodiversity? Often, damage to the environment is put forward as a price worth paying. Should we not be able to show that there are gains in environmental quality that economic expansion can pay for?

Iain Stewart: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I will touch on the potential for growth later in my speech. One project that he and I share a passion for is the east-west rail link, which will not only be of huge economic significance for Oxford and Milton Keynes but hopefully will see a modal shift of transport away from roads and on to rail, thus enhancing the environment. I look forward to working with him on ensuring that the project happens.

Not meeting our five-year housing supply target will lead to speculative planning applications outside the core strategy being submitted, and sometimes granted, in the face of strong local opposition. That in turn creates unplanned demands on infrastructure, which may already be strained, and on services, and it means that Milton Keynes will continue to grow without an overall strategy or an understanding of the wider implications. There is a clear need for the thousands of already agreed planning applications to be brought forward.

My first ask of the Minister today is to explore every possible opportunity and to work with the developers, Milton Keynes Council, South East Midlands local enterprise partnership and all the other stakeholders on upping our annual rate of completions to levels that will satisfy the short to medium-term demand. We may also need to consider having some flexibility in the five-year target if we are able to demonstrate house building in the longer term. There are precedents for Government getting involved: one of the Minister’s predecessors helped to unlock the western flank and Newton Leys developments in Milton Keynes when they stalled in the previous Parliament.

Innovations such as council-initiated housing companies have been successfully deployed by other councils around the country to help bring forward developments. I know that the leader of the opposition in Milton Keynes, Councillor Edith Bald, has proposed that, and I urge Milton Keynes Council seriously to consider it. I also gently remind the Minister of the debate I secured a year ago on shared ownership. Shared ownership could tap into the extra capital sums made available by the Chancellor’s pension reforms, which could help to pump-prime the development of new housing estates.

I urge the Minister to consider all measures that could help to accelerate schemes that already have outline planning permission. Such measures would give Milton Keynes and the surrounding areas the space and time to develop their longer term strategy and their place in the wider Oxford-Cambridge corridor. Let me be clear: I do not see the core strategy from 2013 as the limit of Milton Keynes's ambitions, but it has to be progressed and completed before we rush into further growth that would compound pressures on our infrastructure and services, which we might come to regret further down the line.

I regularly hear very real concerns from constituents about pressure on infrastructure and services. Those people are not anti-growth. The people of Milton Keynes have a positive, forward-looking, can-do attitude, but they are genuinely worried about ill-planned growth compromising the qualities that have made Milton Keynes the success it is. Those concerns cannot be ignored. By getting the short term right, we can plan our future and make our contribution to the national economic and housing growth that we need.

During and since the last general election, I have been calling for such a strategic vision to be developed. I was therefore delighted when Milton Keynes Council set up the Futures 2050 Commission last year. The commission has speedily but thoroughly produced its conclusions. I am particularly pleased that it sees Milton Keynes very much as an enabler in the development of the wider Oxford-Cambridge corridor. I strongly believe that our future economic development will be centred on us being a hub in the middle of that arc.

Looking at our housing growth in the context of that arc is a must. While some intensification of housing in the centre of Milton Keynes and some of the original estates is feasible and arguably would add to the vibrancy of the city centre, my personal view is that continuously adding housing developments to the periphery of Milton Keynes is not necessarily the answer. Nor is there an appetite for enormous housing developments in the greenfield areas surrounding Milton Keynes as that would start to compromise the open spaces and environmental benefits of our existing design. We should have a network of smaller developments that are proportionate and sympathetic to existing settlements, but not massive urban sprawl. That will be a subject of debate when the report is taken forward to Milton Keynes Council next week. If agreed, it will lead to further workstreams. I hope that my views will find favour with many of those who are taking part in that debate.

Whatever the future style of expansion, there are a number of prerequisites. Co-operation with neighbouring authorities will certainly be necessary, and I shall return in the last part of my speech to the administrative aspect of that. As I alluded to when answering the intervention from the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith), there is a need to develop infrastructure along the arc. I am delighted that in the Budget this year, it was announced that the National Infrastructure Commission has been commissioned to look at those projects.

Infrastructure development will certainly involve proceeding as quickly as possible with existing schemes such as east-west rail and the Oxford-Cambridge

expressway, but it will also involve ensuring that the arc is at the forefront of installing the very latest communications technologies, such as 5G. Most significantly, it will need to include the potential transformative effect of smart mobility technology and wider smart cities technology. Milton Keynes is already pioneering such work, with numerous projects up and running—for example, at the transport systems Catapult, at the Open University and in Cranfield. Such technology will facilitate a better network of smaller developments across the arc that will command far more popular support than ever greater urban sprawl.

By developing that infrastructure and placing us at the fulcrum of the arc, Milton Keynes and surrounding towns and villages will be ideally placed to develop a globally competitive knowledge-based economy of scale. Addressing skills is critical to that. The commission's report contains many imaginative proposals, and one of the most exciting of those is the Milton Keynes institute of technology—MK:IT. Milton Keynes has long aspired to have a campus-based university of its own, but I am not sure that the traditional model necessarily fits with what we are and what we can aspire to be. We should innovate, and something like MK:IT would complement the existing higher and further education institutes and provide a pool of skills from which local companies can draw as the economy develops. It would be particularly well placed to be the centre for the intelligent mobility education needed to create a qualified workforce and to allow the UK to gain the lion's share of the intelligent mobility market, which is forecast to reach £900 billion by 2025.

I urge hon. Members to read the report recently published by the transport systems Catapult, which identifies a real gap in our knowledge market and makes some interesting proposals about how we can address that. I believe MK:IT would sit squarely with that. It would also fit neatly with the Government's intention to expand higher education and research, as set out in the recently published Higher Education and Research Bill, which I hope will be in front of the House soon. I urge the Minister to work closely with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and our local higher and further education institutions to explore that opportunity. I believe MK:IT can be the driver of our future growth.

My final point concerns the governance structure for the developments to which I have referred. Milton Keynes's future cannot be seen in isolation from the wider area. Historically, the boroughs, cities and counties along the arc have faced in different directions; that is a product of history and geography. There have been some positive developments to get the different authorities to work more closely together. An example is SEMLEP, but I urge the Minister to consider other innovative solutions. The growth of Milton Keynes and the arc will have to be different from the other models of devolution being introduced in traditional metropolitan conurbations. I do not want the expansion of Milton Keynes to be seen in any way as a land-grabbing exercise from neighbouring authorities, which would rightly and inevitably be resisted, but I urge the Minister to engage with all the authorities along the arc to develop something new that is innovative and collaborative and will facilitate the sorts of development that I have discussed.

[Iain Stewart]

My key ask today is for the Government to give us the space and time to develop our long-term strategy and implementation timetable. There must be solutions to meeting the short-term housing needs while we develop Milton Keynes at the heart of the corridor. The Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission report and the work of the National Infrastructure Commission represent a golden opportunity to develop a bright and successful future built on knowledge, design and understanding. Let us not squander it.

5.1 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) on securing this important debate. I am obviously proud to respond on behalf of the Labour party to the issues raised, and I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey).

You will understand, Mr Walker, that I have been in post for only a short period and it has been rather a busy time for me, but I had the pleasure of serving as a local Labour councillor for 16 years in a previous life, and I understand the importance of strategising and of linking housing to economic development. I am pleased to see in the MK Futures 2050 Commission report a really good example of how a well run, Labour-led local authority—I accept that this is cross-party work—can provide leadership, direction and ambition for the future, even during a very difficult financial period for local government.

As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South mentioned, Milton Keynes is approaching 50 years since being designated a new town by the Wilson Labour Government in 1967. I am familiar with new towns. Peterlee, in my constituency, is from a similar generation, or in fact a little earlier—the post-war generation—and just slightly to the south of that is Newton Aycliffe.

New towns have particular strengths and problems. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, this new town—actually, it is a new city—has developed to the extent that it is home to 270,000 people. As Milton Keynes has grown, so too has its regional, national and, indeed, international importance. I understand that it is now the biggest economy in the South East Midlands LEP area. It has a strong and internationally recognised smart city project and is fast developing into what could be described as the Milton Keynes city economic region.

The city is acknowledged as offering a particularly high quality of life, with many parks and open green spaces. The concept of the original planners was that open green spaces and parks would run throughout the built environment—that was a feature of many new towns of the period.

The importance of Milton Keynes to the UK economy was recognised by no less a person than the Chancellor himself in his Budget speech, when he asked that the National Infrastructure Commission should investigate how infrastructure investment in the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge arc—the so-called innovation corridor referred to by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South—could improve the overall output of the UK economy.

I therefore commend Milton Keynes Council for establishing the MK Futures 2050 Commission, a panel of independent, nationally respected figures from across the academic, business, public and private sectors who have come together to produce a report on how the city can continue to be prosperous into the future. Indeed, the commission has gone further, identifying the challenges and barriers to success and what the city can do in the short, medium and long term to ensure sustainable growth. It is a fine example of not taking the status quo for granted but instead ensuring that local authorities lead the way in innovating and adapting so that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) mentioned, the citizens they represent can access affordable housing, well paid jobs and a clean, healthy lifestyle.

The commission undertook detailed research and gathered evidence, including more than 6,000 submissions from local residents and stakeholders. It highlights the fact that the factors that have made Milton Keynes a success in its first 50 years are the very issues that may have an impact on future growth: affordability, access to well paid employment, good infrastructure and the advantageous geographical position that the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South described—it is near the M1 and the west coast main line and between London, Birmingham, Oxford and Cambridge.

The commission identifies some of the risks to employment that could threaten many jobs, including well paid ones. Housing affordability is a key issue, as it is in much of the south-east, as unaffordable housing limits the supply of a skilled workforce. The city of Milton Keynes, like so many others, including Washington in County Durham, was designed on a grid system. That worked well originally, but is approaching capacity, which could have an impact on future growth. Finally, competition, not just from the UK but from our European and global competitors, will continue and intensify.

The commission concluded that to be successful, Milton Keynes needed to focus on the growth of high-quality, knowledge-intensive jobs and its continued development as a green and affordable place to live. To deliver that economic growth and prosperity, the commission has recommended six “big projects” that are vital to the future success of Milton Keynes. I will not talk about them all, because of the shortage of time, but I want to pick out a couple. The commission recommends that Milton Keynes’s population should grow in the future to at least 400,000 people. As the hon. Gentleman said, much of that growth would not take place in Milton Keynes itself; it would not be within the current local authority boundaries, but would take place along the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor.

I am told that at a recent meeting with the National Infrastructure Commission, the leaders of Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Oxford expressed strong support for that idea, with support from their respective local enterprise partnerships. I am pleased to say that those councils, along with Norwich and Swindon, have come together to form the Fast Growth Cities network, which has also promoted the idea, with the support of the much respected Centre for Cities think tank. Again, the hon. Gentleman referred to that. The importance of those cities to our national economy, with their high-wage, high-productivity, high-skill and low-welfare economies, is significant. To highlight that, I will make a comparison with my own

region, the north-east of England. The gross value added output of those cities is almost equal to that of the northern powerhouse. Given recent events and the UK's intent to leave the EU following the recent Brexit vote, the continued success of those economies is even more vital to the success of the public finances.

If I may, I would like to put a few questions to the Minister. I would like to ask, in particular, when the infrastructure investment in the east-west rail link linking Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge is to be delivered. The scheme has been subject to continued delays and time slippages. I understand that the local authorities, businesses and potential investors are concerned about the great uncertainty over the speedy delivery of that project. Will the Minister give top priority to making representations to the National Infrastructure Commission?

As the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South identified, there is a gap in university provision. I point out that Milton Keynes is home to another excellent creation of the Wilson Labour Government—the Open University, a pioneer in distance learning. The MK Futures 2050 Commission recommends the establishment of a Milton Keynes institute of technology—a kind of Massachusetts Institute of Technology concept, like they have in the United States, which seems a brilliant idea. It would take advantage of, and apply, advanced research and training and transform it into world-leading innovative enterprises. The UK currently lacks that type of establishment, and the idea has enormous potential. Again, I echo the hon. Gentleman by asking the Minister to engage with his colleagues in making representations to BIS, asking it to make contact with Milton Keynes Council to investigate how the idea can be taken forward.

This is a good point at which to highlight that the commission is clear that if growth is to be delivered, the population of Milton Keynes must be able to share in the benefits of growth. It calls it “inclusive growth”, and the point requires highlighting that growth must benefit not the few but the many. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), the shadow Chancellor, has pointed out for some time, that will be easier to achieve with sustained investment in infrastructure. I am pleased that the report favours that approach to growth. Will the Minister agree to meet representatives from the Fast Growth Cities group to discuss their needs, and does he agree that the opportunity of having five local authorities that want to embrace growth, and housing growth in particular, should not go to waste?

I am sure the Minister agrees that the report is an exceptional and groundbreaking exercise by a local authority. It provides a context in which Milton Keynes and the surrounding authorities can discuss growth for the future and address issues they face. I am sure that many local authorities in other parts of the country would be very interested in learning from their experience and example. I therefore urge the Minister to meet representatives from Milton Keynes Council to discuss the benefits and potential of this approach, and to offer any assistance he can in co-ordinating responses from other agencies.

Finally, I would like to place on record my thanks and appreciation to Milton Keynes Council for commissioning this forward-thinking report, and to the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South for raising it today. In particular, council leader Councillor Peter

Marland and the chief executive Carole Mills have shown excellent leadership throughout. The director of strategy, Geoff Snelson, the head of policy, Sarah Gonsalves, and the project manager, Fiona Robinson, have worked tirelessly to produce an excellent report. The Milton Keynes Futures 2050 report is a fine example of local innovation and the power of good local leadership. I look forward to hearing the Minister's reply, and I hope that he will welcome the report; it is well worth considering taking it forward with Milton Keynes Council and the other local authorities.

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Minister, you have until 5.45 pm, but if you would like to leave two minutes at the end for the Member who moved the motion, that would be very well received I am sure.

5.14 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I will ensure that I leave at least two minutes for my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart). I really want to congratulate him on having secured this debate, along with everybody involved in the work of the Milton Keynes Futures 2050 Commission—all the commissioners and Sir Peter Gregson, obviously—who have put this forward and worked with ambition and vision to feed into this long-term plan for Milton Keynes. I think it mirrors the clear ambition and determination that my hon. Friend has to see Milton Keynes continue being a very special place, which I know it is from my experience many years ago—I was not too far from there as a student—and from visiting him over the last few years. It is a really good example of the real success that there has been from the original new town's ambitions; it has continued to grow ever since.

There is the ambition for seeing things like more lifelong learning opportunities at a new university, as the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on the Opposition Front Bench outlined, along with a good example of that kind of ambition. As was said, it is linked with the Open University. It is also important for areas to realise that the planned reforms in the Higher Education and Research Bill announced in the Queen's Speech earlier this year make it easier to establish new universities, helping more providers to offer higher-quality degrees. As a Government we are making sure that we work to deliver in those areas.

No one is in any doubt about the clear ambitions for Milton Keynes for the future, not just through this plan but as part of that Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge growth corridor. In March 2016, the Chancellor announced that he had asked the National Infrastructure Commission to lead an inquiry into the potential of Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge. He asked the commission to explore the corridor as a key growth locale for high-tech, knowledge-intensive industries coupled with an ambitious, high-quality housing offer to meet the growing needs of the area. That commission's inquiry is currently under way and I look forward to seeing its recommendations in due course. It is worth noting, in response to the point made by the hon. Member for Easington, that the consultation is open until 5 August and I encourage people to feed into that.

[*Brandon Lewis*]

Increasing the supply of housing is critical to our economic success, in Milton Keynes and more generally. As a Government, we have got the country building again with a 25% increase last year alone. We have set out an ambitious vision for housing—probably the most ambitious vision for a generation—by doubling the housing budget to more than £20 billion to deliver on our ambitions to build 1 million new homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South outlined and commented on the type of homes, affordable homes and shared ownership. I would encourage the area to look at the available funds. There is £4.7 billion-worth of funding for shared ownership specifically, as well as the £1.2 billion fund for starter homes that is available as well. I hope that organisations in the area will look at those.

We also welcome the recent announcement by the Home Builders Federation, on behalf of its largest members, to further increase that growth in supply. My hon. Friend touched on this issue around build-out rates. This is also creating more transparency as we go forward about what those rates are, and building more homes to support the ambitions we all have to see the homes we need actually being built. Increasing housing supply cannot be done in isolation, and I recognise the important roles that having the right spatial plans, infrastructure and services play in creating the right communities for the future.

I will turn to a couple of points around this issue specifically. First, on planning, Milton Keynes adopted a core strategy in 2013 and I know that it is now working on a new local plan to be published, hopefully, later this year. It is right that local authorities keep their plans up to date and that they work with neighbourhood plans. I was delighted when visiting Milton Keynes not too long ago to see some of the ambitious neighbourhood planning work that is going on; indeed, I think the largest in the country is in Milton Keynes. Local councils need to make sure that they are making decisions on planning applications locally and neighbourhood plans are the ultimate way to do that with the local community having real involvement and control over planning by having a neighbourhood plan that has weight in law. In determining planning applications, local councils have to have regard to their local plan as well as to national planning policy and neighbourhood plans. We are committed to making sure that we keep the country building, to deliver the homes, and the type of homes, that our communities want to see.

Our consultation document in December 2015 proposed specific changes to the national planning policy to drive up the delivery of new housing and bring forward more land for development. However, I recognise that excessive pre-commencement planning conditions can slow down or even stop the construction of homes after they have been given planning permission, and my hon. Friend made the point about the frustration people feel about the gap between planning permission being granted and housing actually being built. The new neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech will seek to deal with that issue. We need to make sure that the homes that are getting planning permission are being built and that the process is not being slowed down by unnecessary bureaucracy.

Grahame M. Morris: Does the Minister accept that the constraints often do not just relate to delays in planning? In my experience, certainly in my authority, that was never an issue. The problems often relate to the lack of infrastructure. The MK Futures 2050 Commission has highlighted how important it is to invest in transport infrastructure. Will he at least acknowledge that that is one area—from the six big issues—that should be addressed?

Brandon Lewis: The hon. Gentleman is getting the cart and the horse the wrong way round. He is absolutely right that, in terms of getting homes built and planning for homes in future, infrastructure is part of the equation and is part of what a local authority should be looking at when it develops its local plan. However, once planning permission is granted—infrastructure is part of the consideration in granting planning permission—one of the main delays that causes the gap between planning permission being granted by the local authority and work starting on site is planning conditions. Examples from around the country show that there can be more than 1,000 planning conditions on one site. That explains why, in many cases, a council will give permission but it can be up to a year or two years later if not longer before a builder can get on site and physically start doing anything, including putting in infrastructure. That frustrates communities, local authorities and builders. We need to make sure that we are doing something about it, so we are taking that kind of bureaucracy out of the system. That is what I mean by saying that we want to continue to reform and speed up the planning process, so we minimise the delays caused by unnecessary or burdensome conditions.

Looking towards the longer term, I recognise the key role that dedicated delivery bodies have played in the creation and continued growth of somewhere such as Milton Keynes. At the outset, there was the new town development corporation, and more recently there has been the Milton Keynes development partnership. I welcome the MK Futures 2050 Commission's focus on ensuring that the right delivery vehicle is in place to drive Milton Keynes' further transformation in future.

Through the Housing and Planning Act 2016, which we have just passed, we have made some important changes to the new towns legislation to make it easier to set up new statutory development corporations when local areas decide that that is the best way forward, but having the right infrastructure in place to support growth is critical for the wider planning process. The neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill will transform how we make long-term plans for our nation's infrastructure, empowering local communities to get the homes and local infrastructure that they want and need delivered, and making infrastructure policy at the national level much more strategic and consistent. The Bill will underpin that statutory function.

Significant funding is already being invested to support housing growth. More than £200 million of the local growth fund has been prioritised to date to support growth across the south-east midlands and the Northamptonshire areas. We are expecting a further bid for local growth funding from the south-east midlands shortly as part of the current bidding round.

In addition, the Government have announced plans to radically reform the business rates system to enable local government to be more self-sufficient and to benefit

from growth. The changes build on the existing reforms that have given areas 50% of the business rate growth, and full retention pilots are going on in four areas. The 100% retention reforms are accompanied by additional flexibilities for local authorities to reduce rates to boost growth, and mayoral combined authorities will have the opportunity to increase rates through an infrastructure levy with the agreement of the local enterprise partnership.

Those are big changes with significant opportunities for local government. How local government chooses to use that retained income and the growth in business rates in areas such as Milton Keynes will be a matter for the people there. However, I am encouraged by Milton Keynes's wish to earmark spending for education and infrastructure investment and by the ambition shown in the report through the six projects. We are sensitive to the challenges that will come with the changes we are making and are therefore seeking feedback on them in an open manner, through a consultation that was launched last week. I encourage people to take part in and respond to that.

Securing the right level of developer contributions is also vital to ensuring that infrastructure is delivered in the right places and is supporting growth. That is part of the planning process. A review of the operation of the community infrastructure levy is being undertaken by an independent panel, which will report back to Ministers later this year. That review is to look at assessing the extent to which the levy provides an effective mechanism for funding infrastructure and to recommend changes that would improve its operation in support of our wider housing and growth objectives, with a clear focus on the needs and plans for local areas.

I recognise the significant ambitions that Milton Keynes has, both as a city and as part of the wider Oxford-MK-Cambridge arc. We look forward to working with the area on just that, as the hon. Member for Easington said.

Grahame M. Morris: In view of that commitment, will the Minister agree to meet representatives of the Fast Growth Cities group to discuss how it is possible to embrace growth—housing growth, in particular—and how that initiative should not go to waste?

Brandon Lewis: I meet the cities group fairly regularly and have done as a local government Minister over the last few years, and I am always happy to meet any organisation that wants to talk about developing more housing in its area. There is very much an open-door policy on areas that want to develop housing.

This is all part of our drive for local areas to have the power to work out what is right for them. That is why it is absolutely right that we continue to devolve powers, and the devolution landscape has been driven by those

local areas. Government have responded to places that are clear about their ambitions and how they want to get there. I encourage areas to work out what they think is right for them and then to make that pitch to us. With the right governance and structures in place, anywhere could look to drive forward its own priorities and find its own local solutions, and to have the power and ability to do that. I look forward to seeing that develop further in Milton Keynes and to seeing it work to deliver on the ambition it clearly has. I know that it will be supported and matched by the ambitions of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South.

5.26 pm

Iain Stewart: May I place on record my gratitude to the Minister, the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) and the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) for their contributions to the debate?

I conclude with this observation: Milton Keynes is unique and it has been an enormous success, and I believe it can continue to innovate and provide the exemplar for other towns and cities round the country. I think the report from the MK Futures 2050 Commission is inspirational and, although I will probably not be here looking back in 50 years' time, I think history will judge this report as the start of a new chapter in urban planning and development.

I am heartened by what the Minister says on a number of fronts, and by the welcome that the Government will give to an innovative model of governance structure. What will work in Milton Keynes and surrounding areas will not be the same as for the west midlands, Greater Manchester, Bristol or any other urban area. It will have to be new and I look forward to seeing proposals coming out from Milton Keynes Council and the neighbouring authorities. I also look forward to seeing the detail in the neighbourhood planning and infrastructure Bill, which will help to unlock developments that have been stalled. What will be interesting is if we can develop a new delivery vehicle for implementing the types of projects that the report contains.

In conclusion, I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to bring to the attention of national Government what we are doing locally. There are still many debates and conversations to be had locally about how we take this forward, but I hope they will be favourably received.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the report by the MK Futures 2050 Commission and developing the Oxford to Milton Keynes to Cambridge arc.

5.28 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statement

Tuesday 12 July 2016

EDUCATION

Initial Teacher Training

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): I am today publishing the reports of the three initial teacher training (ITT) expert groups which I commissioned last year, following a review of ITT carried out by Sir Andrew Carter OBE. Alongside these reports I am also publishing a Government response setting out how we intend to take forward the groups' recommendations.

The review groups were tasked with developing a new framework of core content for ITT; behaviour management content for ITT; and a set of standards for school-based ITT mentors. The three groups were chaired by, respectively, Stephen Munday CBE, Tom Bennett, and the Teaching Schools Council (under the leadership of Vicki Beer CBE and, latterly, Dr Gary Holden).

Sir Andrew Carter's report, published in January 2015, highlighted that the system in England is generally performing well, but that more needs to be done to ensure all trainee teachers receive a strong grounding in the basics of classroom management and subject knowledge development, as well as key areas of practice such as assessment and an increased understanding of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Sir Andrew also suggested that the quality of school-based ITT mentoring is not as good as it could be, and his report made a number of recommendations to both Government and the sector in this regard.

Good teachers are the single most important factor influencing pupils' achievement in school. The Government are therefore committed to ensuring that the education system can recruit, train, develop and retain the best possible teachers in our schools. Key to this is to strengthen the quality and content of ITT programmes so that new teachers enter the classroom appropriately equipped in essential areas such as subject knowledge development and subject-specific pedagogy, practical behaviour management strategies, a sound understanding of SEND, and the ability to use the most up-to-date research on effective teaching practice.

The Government welcome the reports of the three expert groups as an important step towards realising our goals of further improving the quality of teacher training and raising the status of the teaching profession, while directly addressing the issues raised by the Carter review. Our recent White Paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, published in March 2016, set out plans to develop a new set of quality criteria that will in future be applied when training places are being allocated to providers. We will therefore consider how best the new framework of content can be used to inform those criteria, with a view to ensuring that all providers who are allocated training places are clearly demonstrating the quality of content in their courses. Further detail of how we intend to apply the new criteria to the allocation of ITT places from 2017/18 onwards will be published shortly.

Tom Bennett's report sets out some clear recommendations for the teacher training sector on how behaviour management should be delivered within ITT. An abridged version of his full recommendations has formed part of the new framework of core content for ITT. It is clear from the report that providers of ITT should ensure that trainees are able to access high-quality training before they are ready to enter the classroom; this is a recommendation with which we strongly agree, and we would encourage all providers to ensure that their programmes are structured accordingly.

Linked to high-quality training programmes is the critical role that school-based mentors should play in supporting teacher trainees to develop into effective teachers. This is particularly true as we continue to drive the move towards more school-led teacher training, as set out in the White Paper. The Teaching Schools Council, led firstly by Vicki Beer CBE and subsequently by Dr Gary Holden, has developed a set of standards that I believe can help to bring consistency to the practice of mentors, raise the profile of the mentoring role in school-led training, and contribute to building a culture of coaching and mentoring within the teaching profession. All of these are crucial if our next generation of outstanding teachers is to have the greatest possible impact on improving standards of teaching and allowing our children to reach their full potential.

I am placing copies of the reports from Stephen Munday CBE, Tom Bennett and Dr Gary Holden, along with the Government's response to their recommendations, in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS83]

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