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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 19 July 2016

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr Speaker: I must inform the House that I have received written notification from the Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), and from the Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), of their wish to resign from the Chair following their ministerial appointments. In accordance with Standing Order No. 122C, I therefore declare that the Chairs of those two Committees are vacant. I shall announce the arrangements for the elections to those two posts as soon as practicable. I hope that it will be possible to hold those elections during the September sitting.

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

EU Referendum: Economic Situation

1. **Philip Boswell** (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the (a) extent of and (b) economic effect of assets and capital being moved out of the UK as a result of the outcome of the EU referendum. [905943]

2. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): What steps he is taking to update the Government's long-term economic plan in response to the outcome of the EU referendum. [905944]

7. **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the near-term effect of the outcome of the EU referendum on economic confidence and growth in the UK. [905950]

8. **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the economic effect of the outcome of the EU referendum. [905951]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): While it is clear that the referendum decision represents a shock to the UK economy, thanks to the actions taken over the past six years by my predecessor, the economy is well placed to respond. I will work closely with the Bank of England to provide immediate stability and to maintain confidence in the fundamental health

of the UK economy as we prepare for the autumn statement. As further post-referendum economic data are published, the economy's short-term response to the Brexit decision will become clearer. If further measures are required, they will be announced in the autumn statement.

Philip Boswell: Given colleagues' anecdotal evidence of capital flight, the recent vote to leave the EU has plunged the economy into volatility and uncertainty. The Conservative Government have been slow to act and have yet to provide an economic strategy, so will the Chancellor tell the people of the UK when they will get an insight into the scale of capital flight following the Brexit vote?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the shock of the exit vote at the referendum has created short-term turbulence in the UK economy, but we are well placed to manage it. In answer to his question about data, a series of data publications during the late summer and autumn will inform a proper response at the autumn statement.

Owen Thompson: The Conservative Government's so-called long-term economic plan has resulted in their failing on key economic indicators and missing the targets that they set for themselves. Will the Chancellor tell the Chamber whether we will witness an end to this disastrous era of austerity?

Mr Hammond: The UK continues to run a very large fiscal deficit by international standards and we will have to address that deficit. We have already announced that we will no longer seek to bring the budget into balance by 2019-20, but that does not mean that we can go forward without a clear framework for achieving fiscal balance over an appropriate timeframe. We will address that issue in the autumn statement.

Ian Blackford: I welcome the new Chancellor to his place and wish him all good luck—for all our sakes, he is going to need it. A Deloitte survey of 132 FTSE 350 chief financial officers found that nearly two thirds of them expect revenues to fall. As the *Financial Times* puts it, business confidence is now lower than at the time of the collapse of Lehman, with 82% of companies expected to reduce capital spending. This crisis has been caused by Brexit. What tangible steps will the Chancellor take to restore confidence? Don't just give us waffle—give us real plans.

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right; the figures that he quotes are right. The evidence is anecdotal in the early stages, as he would expect. As he would also expect, the initial response to this kind of shock must be a monetary response delivered by the Bank of England. In announcing that interest rates were not to be lowered last week, the Governor made it clear that the Bank is developing a monetary package that will be announced in due course.

Kevin Brennan: The Chancellor's certainty that the purchase of ARM by SoftBank is good for the UK following the EU referendum is not shared by its founder Hermann Hauser, who said it means that

“determination of what comes next for technology will not be decided in Britain any more, but in Japan”.

Why does the Chancellor think that the company's founder is wrong?

Mr Hammond: I suspect that the founder of the company has not had the benefit of discussions with the acquiring company. I have met the leader of the current management team, who are wholeheartedly supporting the purchase by SoftBank. We have achieved some very hard guarantees—these were volunteered without our having to extract them—about the future autonomy of the company, headquartered in the UK, and about its commitment to double the number of UK employees over the next five years. What became very clear from a discussion with the founder and CEO of SoftBank is that it firmly believes Cambridge will be the global centre for developing the internet of things and ARM will play a key role in developing that industry.

Mr Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): I warmly welcome the Chancellor to his new role. It is probably the job he always wanted—unless of course he wants eventually to move next door. I note that to most questions so far he has said he is going to wait until the autumn statement, so I am hoping I get an answer to this one a bit earlier. Sticking to the fiscal surplus rule has rightly been scrapped by the previous Chancellor, and the automatic stabilisers have been allowed to kick in. The higher deficit implied by that decision will have to be plugged sooner or later. From 2010, the Chancellor's predecessor planned an 80% consolidation of that to come from spending, with only 20% coming from tax. *[Interruption.]* There is a question coming, if hon. Members can be patient. Does the Chancellor intend to stick to his predecessor's target of 80:20 or is he going to vary it?

Mr Hammond: My right hon. Friend will know that the surplus rule always came with the caveat that if the Office for Budget Responsibility forecast four rolling consecutive quarters of less than 1% annualised growth, the target would be suspended. The consensus among pretty much all forecasters is that that is likely to be what they forecast this autumn statement, so my predecessor's announcement was merely pre-empting something that almost everybody expects to happen. I am afraid to tell my right hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie) that how we are going to respond over the longer term to the resulting deficit will be set out at the autumn statement.

Mr Speaker: In the hope that the hon. Gentleman will provide a masterclass in the asking of a question, I call Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his appointment. I accept that that is not a question but a statement. May I go on to point out to him that Brexit provides a great opportunity? The £24 billion purchase of ARM by SoftBank is a sign of that. The trade deals that are being offered are a sign of that. Will he grasp this fantastic opportunity and lead us through to the “broad, sunlit uplands”?

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend rightly points to the fundamental strengths of the UK economy. Britain is still one of the most attractive places in the world to do

business, to start a business and to invest money, and it is right that we should focus on those positive aspects. But it is also right that we are conscious of the short-term turbulence that we will inevitably experience and of the need to manage that carefully over the next 18 months.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I, too, welcome the Chancellor to his place. As has been mentioned, SoftBank has made a huge investment in a fantastic Cambridgeshire business. It has done that because Cambridgeshire is at the forefront of technology and innovation. The company has said, as the Chancellor has mentioned, that it is going to double the workforce. Cambridgeshire can continue to attract investment such as this only if we have the infrastructure to support it, so will he confirm that he will be committed to infrastructure investment in roads such as the A10?

Mr Hammond: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right; raising the UK's productivity is the long-term challenge of our economy, and infrastructure investment is one of the ways we do that. I draw attention to another point: the success of Cambridge today, not only as a centre of academic excellence but as an innovation hub of global importance, has arisen because of the very foresighted decision of Cambridge City Council many years ago to allow development around the city and the creation of the Cambridge business park, which is now a world magnet for investment.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I, too, congratulate the Chancellor on his ascension. One of the key flows of capital that is likely to increase post-Brexit is the £300 million or so that is invested every year in gilts by those seeking a UK investor visa. This is of little productive value to the UK economy. I wrote to the previous Treasury team suggesting that this money would be better invested in drug discovery but, amazingly, I got the brush-off. May I impose myself upon the Chancellor of the Exchequer and ask for a meeting to explain the merits of requiring these people to invest in the productive part of the UK economy?

Mr Hammond: I anticipate that there will be a need to fund UK Government gilt issuance for the foreseeable future, but I understand my hon. Friend's point and I would be happy to discuss it with him.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I am sure you will allow me to extend my congratulations to the Chancellor. He will remember that I welcomed him as a very fresh-faced Back Bencher to the 1997 Budget, when he already showed great promise, which he has more than fulfilled now. Does he agree that the major current threat—there are many—from Brexit is in fact the interruption to investment in British industry and in Britain, and therefore that the purchase by SoftBank of ARM is to be welcomed? In view of the undertakings that ARM has given, that is the best antidote to the prevailing doubts.

Mr Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right and I thank him for his kind words. We need to remind ourselves that we are running a 6.9% of GDP external account deficit, and that has to be funded somehow. It has been funded by an extraordinarily successful run of foreign direct investment into the UK—more than into

any other country in the European Union. That has slowed as uncertainty around the referendum has been created. We now need to generate the confidence to allow it to resume.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): I take this opportunity to welcome the Chancellor to his post, and also the Chief Secretary and other new Treasury Ministers. There is a real concern that the uncertainty surrounding Brexit is forcing many businesses and international banks to consider moving their core operations and the jobs that go with them overseas. Banks in particular make use of their EU banking passport arrangements to operate within the UK, so what measures will the Chancellor be taking to avoid the loss of those arrangements?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady is right to say that passporting is an important feature of the arrangements we have with the European Union. In the negotiations that we will have in the future with the European Union about Britain's future relationship with it, protecting those rights for our very important financial services sector, which I should emphasise is not just about London—two thirds of financial services jobs in this country are outside London—will be a very important part of those negotiations.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Moving back to the issue of ARM, analysts this week have predicted a raft of foreign takeovers linked to the fall in the value of the pound following Brexit. The Chancellor stated this week that Britain is open to foreign investment, barely a week after the Prime Minister wanted to oppose such takeovers, so has the Government's approach to securing new investment been reduced in the space of a week from an ambiguous industrial policy to merely slashing corporation tax and hoping for the best?

Mr Hammond: No. The UK remains very much open to foreign investment, but we are very clear that we want investors who will invest in British technology, British jobs and businesses headquartered, based and directed from the UK. We are not open to asset-strippers.

Infrastructure Development

3. **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): What steps he is taking to support infrastructure development in the west midlands. [905946]

4. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What steps he is taking to support infrastructure development in the north-west. [905947]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): There are 40 schemes in the west midlands in the infrastructure pipeline, with a total value of £7.6 billion. More than 300 infrastructure schemes have been delivered in the west midlands since 2010. There are 88 projects in the north-west in the infrastructure pipeline, with a total value of £34.5 billion. More than 240 infrastructure schemes have been delivered in the north-west since 2010.

Amanda Milling: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new role. The Rugeley B power station site is truly a hub of connectivity, where the national grid,

broadband and rail infrastructure all come together, and it is an ideal location for redevelopment. Will my right hon. Friend outline the assistance that the Government can provide to ensure the speedy redevelopment of the site, and will he meet me to discuss the possibility of creating a Rugeley enterprise zone on this strategically important site in the west midlands?

Mr Gauke: I thank my hon. Friend for her kinds words, and for her question. It is not the first representation that I have received in the few days in which I have been doing this job, and I suspect that it might not be the last I receive today. I would be delighted to meet her to discuss the enterprise zone and the site that she talks about. It is important that we have world-class infrastructure. If we can bring that together in various forms on particular sites, it will enable us to make further and faster progress. I look forward to discussing that with her in future.

Andrew Stephenson: May I too congratulate my right hon. Friend on his promotion? The recently announced infrastructure bonds will help to improve productivity and promote economic growth across the north-west. Will he outline the projects that could be eligible for this funding?

Mr Gauke: I am not sure that this morning is the point at which I can provide specific examples, but I can say that this Government are very ambitious about infrastructure. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has pointed out, infrastructure is one of the ways in which we can drive up productivity. That is one of the great challenges that we face, but we as a Government are determined to address it.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The Minister has reeled off a list of moneys going to infrastructure projects in the west midlands. Will he publish a list of all those moneys that he is delivering? Who is going to be accountable for this public money—the local enterprise partnerships, the combined authorities, the local authorities, or HS2 Ltd?

Mr Gauke: It was not just the money—I also rattled off the numbers. I would be delighted to provide the hon. Lady with details of the projects that have been delivered, with, as I say, 300 infrastructure schemes delivered in the west midlands and 240 infrastructure schemes delivered in the north-west. Accountability depends on the specific nature of the schemes. Clearly, over the past six years we have delivered on infrastructure, but there is more to do and we are determined to do it.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): One of the absurdities of the previous Chancellor's tenure was the fiscal rule that forbade borrowing money for infrastructure investment even when the return on that investment would have grossly exceeded the cost of the borrowing. Instead, the former Chancellor ended up borrowing billions to compensate for low growth and the cost of failure. That orthodoxy was strongly challenged in the Conservative leadership election, so will we now see a more rational approach from this Chancellor's team?

Mr Gauke: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made clear, and as, indeed, the previous Chancellor made clear, in circumstances where there is a projection

of growth less than 1% over a 12-month period, that fiscal rule does not apply. The fact is that we inherited a very high deficit, and we have shown very strong determination over the past six years to bring that deficit down. As we face the challenges that we now face in terms of Brexit, had we not taken the tough decisions on public spending over the past six years, we would be in a much more vulnerable position than we are now.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The previous Chancellor announced a new light rail link between the midland metro and the new enterprise zone in Brierley Hill in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss how we can extend that to the main line rail link at Stourbridge so that we can support businesses, communities and jobs in my constituency?

Mr Gauke: I note that my prediction that I would receive further representations and diary request appears to be holding true. I am happy also to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the project that he mentioned.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Chancellor to his position, and I welcome his whole team. It is a deserved promotion for the Chief Secretary, whom I believe I promoted only a month ago in a speech to the House.

EU funding for the regions comes to £10 billion a year. At the recent Local Government Association conference, councillors from all parties expressed their concern over the potential loss of these structural funds. Will the Chief Secretary clarify whether he plans to make funding provision equivalent to that received through the EU structural funds in the event of the UK leaving the EU?

Mr Gauke: First, I thank the shadow Chancellor for his kind words. Yes, his description of me as Chief Secretary last month proved to be ahead of its time. That is not a phrase I often use about the shadow Chancellor, but he was right on this occasion.

On the structural funds, of course we need to make an assessment of value for money and so on. We will make announcements in due course. I recognise the case for wanting to address uncertainty, but it is right that we follow due process before we make any announcements.

John McDonnell: I am grateful for that, but may I ask the Chief Secretary that, in the interests of local government stability, that statement is made sooner rather than later?

The vote to leave also affects the UK's access to European Investment Bank funds, which last year came to £6.5 billion across the country. With business investment falling even before the vote to leave, and with Government investment scheduled to fall until the end of this Parliament, what action is the Chancellor taking to ensure that Britain retains its stake in the European Investment Bank?

Mr Gauke: First, on the general point, I recognise what the hon. Gentleman is driving at in terms of uncertainty and the desirability to resolve the issue sooner rather than later.

It is the case that the UK did very well from the European Investment Bank in recent months in terms of attracting investment. There is no evidence as yet

that the UK will be discriminated against during the period that we remain members of the EU, but the hon. Gentleman is right to raise the issue. We will continue to monitor the situation and we want to ensure that we continue to do well from the EIB.

Support for Businesses

5. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What fiscal steps he is taking to support businesses. [905948]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government are committed to ensuring that Britain has a competitive corporate tax system that encourages innovation and business investment. We have already announced a reduction in corporation tax to 17%—the lowest rate in the G20—and we are reducing the business rates burden by £6.7 billion. The Government have also increased the rate of research and development tax credits and set the annual investment allowance at its highest ever permanent level.

Maria Caulfield: I thank the Chancellor for his response and congratulate him on his new role. Many small businesses in my constituency face difficulties. The Costcutter on Claremont Road in Seaford employs four people, but the store is too large to benefit from the Government's extension of small business rates relief to properties whose rateable value is less than £12,000. Will the Chancellor therefore consider reintroducing the retail rate relief, which last year helped such businesses with a £1,500 discount on their rates bill?

Mr Hammond: The retail scheme was a temporary arrangement until the current proposals were fleshed out fully, so I am afraid that we will not be able to reintroduce it. Many businesses that benefited under the old, temporary retail scheme will benefit from the permanent scheme that we have introduced to reduce the burden of business rates, but I am afraid that some may slip through the net.

20. [905963] **Danny Kinahan** (South Antrim) (UUP): May I congratulate the Chancellor and his team on their appointment? On supporting businesses, PricewaterhouseCoopers yesterday said that growth in Northern Ireland is likely to remain at zero, the worst in the United Kingdom. Will the Chancellor put in place some mechanisms—he has already discussed enterprise zones such as Belfast international airport—to help us?

Mr Hammond: One of our priorities, in the interests both of social fairness and of improving the productivity of the economy, will be to address the huge—one might say almost grotesque—disparities between economic performance in the different regions and nations of the UK. That will be a central part of our productivity agenda, which will be a key cornerstone of our long-term economic plan.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Since the referendum, some businesses in my constituency have put investment and recruitment on hold due to uncertainty. They welcome the policies that my right hon. Friend has mentioned. I also welcome the indication that he will look at further fiscal stimulus in the autumn statement, but that is some time off. May I press him to reveal a bit more about the options that he might consider to support the economy and businesses?

Mr Hammond: I am afraid that I shall not be tempted by my hon. Friend to speculate on the content, or even the date, of the autumn statement. What I can say is that the Bank of England is well equipped with the tools necessary to deal with the short-term needs of the economy following the shock of the referendum, and the autumn statement is well placed, after the batch of economic data that will be published this autumn, to provide a longer-term response.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new position. He may recall that his predecessor cut corporation tax for business to allow the living wage to be introduced. As we speak, Marks and Spencer is consulting on cutting overtime payments and Sunday and bank holiday pay, in order to do just that. What will the Chancellor do to ensure that my constituent, Mrs M, does not lose £2,000 a year because of the introduction of the living wage?

Mr Hammond: Very clearly, the intention of the introduction of the living wage was not to make people worse off; it was precisely to support the living standards of those on the lowest wages. I will look carefully at the case that the hon. Lady has drawn to my attention.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I welcome the Chancellor to his post. A report published in March illustrated that someone who lives in a deprived area is 50% less likely to start a business on a self-employed basis, and it highlighted the barriers they face to starting such a business. Will my right hon. Friend consider the recommendations in the report and work with me to reverse that trend?

Mr Hammond: I am very happy to do that. One of the great strengths of the UK economy is our innate entrepreneurialism. We need to foster that, and we need to make sure that it works in all areas, regions and nations of the United Kingdom.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): May I congratulate the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on their new roles? The problem we have seen over many years is that fiscal policy occasionally works against the interests of business. Innovation funding has been converted from grants to loans, and there has been a cut during this Parliament to the UK Trade & Investment budget. I ask the Chancellor, who is new and fresh to the job, to look again at those policies, in particular, to make sure that innovation and export support funding is aligned with innovating and exporting businesses.

Mr Hammond: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will be looking comprehensively at all areas of the portfolio as I prepare for the autumn statement, in the context of the economic situation that we face post this shock.

Stewart Hosie: I welcome that, and I ask the Chancellor to look again at one other thing. One of the problems that business and the economy face is a lack of demand. May I ask the Chancellor to look again not just at headline corporation tax cuts, but at an intelligent use of allowances—for example, the reintroduction of industrial

buildings allowance—to build demand for construction now and long-term supply side capacity to boost what we do, particularly in terms of exporting, in the future?

Mr Hammond: I assure the hon. Gentleman that when we look at the corporate tax environment, we will not just be looking at headline rates. We will be looking at the marginal effective rates of corporate tax for investors in the UK, because that is what we want to target—more investment, more jobs and the creation of more wealth in the UK.

Business Rates

6. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reform the business rates system. [905949]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison): As my hon. Friend knows, in Budget 2016 we announced the biggest ever cut in business rates in England, worth £6.7 billion over the next five years. The package cuts business rates for all ratepayers, and 600,000 of the smallest businesses will not have to pay business rates again. The Government are also looking to modernise the administration of the tax to make sure that it is fit for the 21st century.

Michelle Donelan: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her new role. Have the Government decided whether car park business rates will be devolved to local authorities? That would offer a significant reduction in council overheads, which could enable Wiltshire Council in my constituency to reduce parking fees and improve the economies of our local market towns.

Jane Ellison: I congratulate my hon. Friend on taking such a close interest in what will boost her local economy. The Government have announced that they will devolve 100% of business rate revenues to local government. The details are subject to consultation, and the consultation document was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government earlier this month. She and her local council may well want to contribute to that consultation, and she may want to make the point that she made so well just now.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Some of the richest areas in the country find it easiest to raise money through the business rate system. If we are not to perpetuate poverty and the gap between rich and poor parts of the country, do not the Government, if they are going to proceed with this, have to make sure that there are proper balancing mechanisms? Otherwise, the problems that we have seen in so many parts of the country, which feel completely forgotten and left aside, will be perpetuated for future generations.

Jane Ellison: I am very well aware of the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. In my previous role, I had responsibility for the public health grant, and those points were made in that context on several occasions. We have an open consultation on business rates retention. We are aware of that issue, and the existing system of redistribution will be continued in some form. Obviously, that is something at which we will look closely.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): The business rates system sometimes interacts with the planning system to leave premises empty, but incurring tax. Will the Government work to ensure that councils are appropriately incentivised to ensure that premises are productively occupied so that business owners have a chance of paying the tax they incur?

Jane Ellison: I hear the point that my hon. Friend makes. That is clearly something to which further consideration will be given.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Any help that small businesses get from business rates reform will be very welcome in my constituency of Huddersfield, but that does not outbalance the fact that my university and my manufacturing businesses have been hard hit by Brexit. I know that the Minister is not one of the guilty Brexiteers, but what will the Government do to help manufacturing industry and universities so hard hit?

Jane Ellison: The Chancellor has already made a number of comments about how we will deal with and address this situation, and more will clearly be said in the autumn. It is important that we recognise that, while we undoubtedly face some risks and have to look to manage them, we must also seize the opportunities we can take from the situation we are in.

To return to the point about business rates, taking 600,000 of the very smallest businesses out of business rates altogether is a good thing. It has not taken effect yet. It is important to make it clear that although that has been announced, it has yet to take effect. We all have a job to do in the spring to make sure that our local businesses get the maximum benefit.

Northern Powerhouse

10. **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): What progress he has made on the establishment of the northern powerhouse. [905953]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): A northern powerhouse will be built by connecting up the cities in the north so that the whole is greater than the parts. We have committed billions to new transport investment and devolved powers to the cities, and we are promoting science and culture. According to one recent survey, the result is that the number of foreign direct investment projects in the north is up by 127% since 2014. The employment rate is now close to its record high, and unemployment has fallen faster than in the south.

Julian Sturdy: May I add my congratulations to the new Front-Bench team? In medieval times, the north was ruled from the great city of York. Even in Yorkshire, things do move on, but the need for well-connected transport links is still fundamental for every thriving city. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that sufficient funding is in place to deliver the key infrastructure needs, such as the upgrading of the York northern ring road, which will allow the city to fulfil its true potential in the new enterprise zone?

Mr Gauke: This Government are determined to ensure that we have strong transport infrastructure in the north of England, but I very much hear the points my hon.

Friend has made. We have committed to investing an extra £161 million to accelerate the transformation of the M62, and £75 million to improve other road links, including the A66 and the A69. We very much recognise the case he is making and, as I say, as a Government we are determined to ensure that the north of England can fulfil its potential.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): May I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his promotion to the Cabinet? Earlier, he was very vague about the European structural funds. Some £800 million of European structural funds were part of the north-east devolution deal. Without a guarantee from the Government, the loss of that money will drive a coach and horses through the deal. [Interruption.] I will give the Minister time to listen to what the Chancellor is saying in the hope that he can come to the Dispatch Box and say that the Government will guarantee the £800 million.

Mr Gauke: As I said earlier, we recognise the need to bring any uncertainty to an end as soon as we possibly can. In the circumstances, it is right that we take a moment before making any guarantees, but let me be absolutely clear that as a Government we remain committed to doing everything we can to strengthen the northern powerhouse and to ensure that the north of England fulfils its full potential, which includes transport infrastructure. On the specific point, we will make an announcement in the not-too-distant future.

Mr Speaker: Despite his sudden shyness, the man in the cream suit has an identical question, and I want to give him his opportunity. Mr Alec Shelbrooke.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): No. 17, sir.

Mr Speaker: No, spit it out now, man!

17. [905960] **Alec Shelbrooke:** Since 2010, my city of Leeds has seen hundreds of millions of pounds invested in its transport infrastructure. I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can confirm that the billions of pounds that were to be put into the northern powerhouse to invest in transport infrastructure across the whole of Yorkshire and the Humber will still be delivered.

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

Mr Gauke: This is one of those rare occasions when the Chief Secretary can be like the man from Del Monte and say yes.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The northern powerhouse plans in south Yorkshire are at risk. In the 1980s, our economic regeneration was kick-started by funding from Europe and it still supports small businesses, training and apprenticeships, so may I give the Chief Secretary another chance? Will he guarantee that the £174 million that has been pledged to south Yorkshire under the current programme will be paid in full?

Mr Gauke: The right hon. Gentleman will understand, as a former Treasury Minister, that there is a need for consistency. My answer remains that we will make an

announcement soon. We recognise the point that he is making and the desire to remove uncertainty, but I am not in a position to make an announcement this morning.

21. [905964] **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): There are nine enterprise zones in the north-west of England, including the magnificent Sci-Tech Daresbury in Weaver Vale, which employs more than 500 scientists. Does my right hon. Friend agree that enterprise zones are essential to the Government's commitment to rebalance the economy, close the north-south divide and build a great northern powerhouse?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Enterprise zones, which were reintroduced by the Government in the last Parliament, are important in creating a clustering effect and a culture of enterprise. They are making a big contribution to the northern powerhouse and playing a role in the increase in investment in the north of England.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): May I welcome the new Ministers to the Front Bench? Five northern powerhouse combined authority leaders have requested a meeting with the Prime Minister in Manchester to discuss the serious implications of Brexit for the northern economy, given its massive contribution to the country as a whole. In advance of the Brexit vote, will the Chief Secretary tell the House how many civil servants were working on regional plans, or any other plans for that matter, for such an eventuality?

Mr Gauke: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman and welcome him to his post. I am delighted to see that the shadow Front Bench is almost up to full complement.

We obviously face a number of challenges in terms of the new situation, but there are also a number of opportunities. As I have made clear repeatedly today, the Government are determined to ensure that, whatever the consequences of the Brexit vote, we will enable the northern cities to prosper and work together. That remains a Government priority.

Early Intervention

11. **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): If he will commission research on the potential long-term savings to the public purse of greater investment in cross-departmental schemes to promote early intervention; and if he will make a statement. [905954]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The Government recognise the benefits of early intervention to ensure that all children and young people receive the best possible start in life. The Government worked with the hon. Gentleman and others to establish the Early Intervention Foundation. We continue to provide funding to the foundation to develop and share the evidence base in this area. The Government have also invested £770 million in the troubled families programme, which aims to achieve sustained positive outcomes for 400,000 families with multiple complex problems by 2020.

Mr Allen: I welcome the new Treasury Front Benchers to their duties. I hope that they will take the opportunity over the summer to reorient the Treasury's thinking

away from late intervention, firefighting and paying excessively to put things right, and consider an early intervention philosophy that allows the Treasury to invest early and make a lot of money. They should look at Big Society Capital and its terms of reference, and consider the possibility of improving the market for social investment bonds. Will the Chief Secretary meet me and colleagues from all parties to discuss those issues?

Mr Gauke: I am very happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss those issues. To be fair to the Government, we introduced social impact bonds and the troubled families programme, which seems to be working. There are good signs in terms of improved school attendance and reduced youth crime and antisocial behaviour. We do recognise the benefits of early intervention, but I am happy to discuss it with him at greater length over the weeks ahead.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I add my congratulations to the Chief Secretary and commend to him last year's "Building Great Britons" report by the all-party parliamentary group for the first 1,001 critical days, which I chair. The report revealed that the cost of getting it wrong on perinatal mental health and child neglect is some £23 billion. Does he agree that investing in young people at an early stage is every bit as beneficial to the economy as investing in roads and infrastructure? Will he allow the all-party group to give him a presentation on how we can save him and the country a great deal of money and give our children a better future?

Mr Gauke: I would be interested in seeing such a presentation, whether with the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) or separately—I am happy either way. The Government have already demonstrated a willingness to look at any such case and will respond to the evidence, which I look forward to hearing.

Global Tax Evasion

13. **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): What steps his Department has taken to tackle global tax evasion. [905956]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jane Ellison): I am really proud of the role that the Government and the UK have played in recent years. The country has taken a leading role in tackling tax evasion and avoidance, driving fundamental reform of the international rules and standards. For example, we led the development and early implementation of the new global standard for automatic exchange of information on offshore accounts. I am sure we will continue to offer global leadership on this vital issue.

Tulip Siddiq: The Panama papers revealed what most of us had long suspected—that the super-rich enjoy manipulating the tax system—but I was astonished to learn in a written response from the former Chancellor that the £10 million multi-agency taskforce set up to investigate those revelations still does not have the

Panama papers in its possession. Will the Minister clarify what the £10 million has been spent on, or is it another example of creative Tory accounting?

Jane Ellison: I understand that there may be some logistical barriers to acquiring the papers—[*Interruption*]—with the journalists, in fact. I will write to the hon. Lady with more detail, but I do not believe there is any fault on the part of Her Majesty's Treasury.

15. [905958] **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): Does the Minister agree that one strand of activity in the campaign is to continue to reduce corporation tax? Does she agree that we should have an aspiration to have the lowest corporation tax of any country in Europe?

Jane Ellison: Obviously, the effective rate is what really matters. We have set out a sensible and good ambition for 2020, but internationally what matters is what people pay. I return to the point that the UK has led the world. More and more countries have signed up to looking at how we ensure that multinational corporations pay what they should.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): When it comes to corporation tax, we can only get the take that we should if we know what is going on in those companies. I welcome the Prime Minister's words on tackling the Amazons, the Googles and others. May I suggest to the Minister—I welcome her to her new post—that the Treasury team reconsider introducing in the Finance Bill when it returns to the House in the autumn a public country-by-country reporting amendment, so that we can see what is going on, and so that whatever the corporation tax rate is, we get what we deserve?

Jane Ellison: I am aware of the right hon. Lady's interest in the matter and of previous debates. The key thing is that that has to happen on a multinational basis—that is what we feel. It will be an issue at the forthcoming G20 Finance Ministers meeting and we will have more to say about it. I return to the fact that the UK has a world-leading position and will continue to push the global community to go further.

Employment Levels

14. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What assessment he has made of recent trends in the level of employment. [905957]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby): The employment level stands at 31.6 million, which represents more people in work than ever before. Over the past year, employment growth has been driven by full-time workers and by high and medium-skill occupations, showing that the recovery has produced high-quality employment, helping to boost productivity and raise living standards across the country.

Jeremy Lefroy: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his well deserved appointment. In Stafford, employment is at record levels and the jobseeker's allowance claimant rate has fallen since 2010 from 3.2% to 1.1%, but employers point out to me that there are increasing skills shortages. Will he have discussions with colleagues

in the Department for Education about strengthening engagement between employers and schools on that subject?

Simon Kirby: My hon. Friend, as ever, makes an excellent point. Unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 2,700 since 2010. Skills are absolutely important and I will be having the conversation he suggests.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I welcome the new Economic Secretary to his role in the Treasury. I am sure he will bring a much-needed dash of colour and flamboyance.

Employment is incredibly important in my constituency and across Scotland. Will the Treasury give an absolute commitment today that not one penny of research and development funding that goes to the wonderful higher education institutions across Scotland, and particularly in my constituency, will be lost as a result of the EU Brexit decision?

Simon Kirby: The hon. Gentleman is, as always, very entertaining. The Chief Secretary has said that we will make an announcement in due course.

Topical Questions

T1. [905933] **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): My priority is to ensure the stability and prosperity of the UK economy. That means a combination of near-term measures to respond to the shock that the economy has received, and longer-term measures to manage the impact of transition out of the EU and to reposition the UK economy to maximise its potential in the new circumstances we will then face.

Alberto Costa: I add my congratulations to the new Front-Bench team. Leicestershire County Council is one of the lowest funded local authorities in the country. The council is reaching the point where it may not be able to meet all its statutory obligations. Given that, will my right hon. Friend help to arrange an urgent meeting between his counterparts in the Department for Communities and Local Government and council officials to discuss this matter?

Mr Hammond: As my hon. Friend notes, that is a CLG lead, but I am very happy to facilitate such a meeting for him.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): The Chancellor will, I hope, have seen the research published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies this morning. It shows that young people in work are still earning 7% less than before the crisis, while older workers have seen no improvement in their earnings for seven years. Will the Chancellor take this opportunity to put an end to what is becoming a lost decade of austerity, deliver the public investment that can provide well-paid, secure jobs across the country and scrap the anachronistic fiscal rule?

Mr Hammond: Since this is our first outing together, let me take the opportunity to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that I do not believe in the money tree; I am clear that we have to pay our way in the world. We have a very large fiscal deficit that we have to address, but while doing that we also have to ensure we maximise the productive capability of the UK economy. That means targeting our investment into skills—that does largely mean young people—and infrastructure, and encouraging capital formation in private businesses.

T2. [905934] **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Last year, the former Chancellor came to Hastings and committed to extending high-speed rail from Ashford to Hastings and Bexhill. This investment is the key to delivering local housing, a labour market and business expansion. I welcome the Chancellor to his position and ask for his commitment to this vital project.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. On the particular proposal he sets out, he is a strong champion for his constituents. If he will forgive me, in my new position of trying to control the purse strings all such matters have to be looked at. As I have made very clear, however, the Government are committed to improving transport infrastructure throughout the country, including in Sussex.

T4. [905936] **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): I voice my compliments to the new Front-Bench team and my acknowledgement of the old.

The prospect of moving to an ultra-low corporation tax rate has already been aired. That, of course, has huge implications for the revenues of developing countries. Will the Chancellor undertake to carry out and publish a spill-over analysis of the effect of UK tax rates and rules on developing countries, as the Governments of Ireland and Netherlands have done?

Mr Gauke: The position of the UK Government on corporation tax and the impact on developing countries is very clear. We believe in taxing the profits of economic activity that occur here, and that is as far as it goes. Over the last six years, we have consistently helped to build up tax capacity in developing countries and provided support to their revenue authorities so that they might be better able to collect the taxes that are due. The international system is moving towards helping those countries as well.

T3. [905935] **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): I congratulate the Chancellor on his appointment and ask that when he looks through his in-tray, he pick up the recent report from the all-party group on financial education for young people. I chaired the inquiry that produced the report, which concluded that while it was a positive step that financial education was included in the national curriculum, delivery was still too patchy, meaning that millions of children were ill-equipped to deal with money when they left school. Will my right hon. Friend commit to making that issue a priority?

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Simon Kirby): I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in this interesting and increasingly complex matter. It is very

important that people have the skills they need to help them to navigate financial matters, which is why in 2014 the coalition Government made financial education part of the national curriculum in English schools. That said, I am quite happy to concede that there is more work to be done.

T6. [905938] **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Even excluding cuts to welfare and capital spending, the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts that funding for day-to-day public services will fall between 2009-10 and 2019-20 by the equivalent of about £1,800 per head, while between 2014-15 and 2019-20, day-to-day spending per head is forecast to fall by £1,000 per head. What plans does the Chancellor have to reverse this dangerous trend?

Mr Hammond: I have no plans at the moment to reverse the spending plans set out by my predecessor. Any such plans will be announced in the autumn statement. I would say to the hon. Lady, however, that Scotland now has devolved taxation and spending powers and can consider addressing the balance within its own competence.

T5. [905937] **Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): The Chancellor got his first job in my constituency, so it is a pleasure to welcome him to his latest job. The borough of Rushcliffe has now produced two excellent Chancellors of the Exchequer. In truth, however, Britain has not had a Chancellor since Nigel Lawson who has taken tax simplification seriously. As we prepare the economy for Brexit, will my right hon. Friend make it one of his priorities and consider, in the eight months before the next Budget, creating a commission on tax simplification?

Mr Gauke: We have created the Office of Tax Simplification and are currently legislating in the Finance Bill to put it on a legislative basis. It is setting out more and more ambitious plans for how the tax system could be simplified, and a large number of its recommendations have already been implemented, but there is still more to be done.

T7. [905939] **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): As a proud Londoner, I believe that we must have greater control over taxes and public services, especially in the light of Brexit. I know that my friend Sadiq Khan has ambitious plans for London. Will the Chancellor commit to an initial devolution deal for London in his first autumn statement?

Mr Hammond: I am afraid that I will have to disappoint the hon. Lady, as I cannot commit to anything in the autumn statement at this stage, but I am meeting the Mayor of London later this week and look forward to a constructive discussion with him.

Mrs Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I congratulate the Chancellor and his new team. Do they agree that we need a broad coalition of countries around the world if we are to ensure that big businesses start to pay their taxes? Will he give his full support to the work in the OECD, the G20 and the G7 that started at the G8 summit at Fermanagh in 2013?

Mr Hammond: Yes, as one of my colleagues has already said, if we are to tackle the issue of profit shifting by global corporations, we have to do it on a global basis. This is an important topic on the agenda of the G20 Finance Ministers meeting this weekend in Chengdu, China, in which I intend to take a full part.

T8. [905940] **Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): What positive consideration will the new Treasury team give to the implementation of fiscal flexibilities to assist and underpin our tourism industry?

Mr Hammond: We will look in the autumn statement at all sectors of the economy, and where we believe that additional fiscal support is necessary, we will announce appropriate measures.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): I welcome the Chancellor to his place. Does he agree that big business needs to change and that large multinational companies, including Amazon, Google and Starbucks, have a duty to put something back and pay off a debt to their fellow citizens, and a responsibility to pay their taxes?

Mr Hammond: Yes.

T9. [905941] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): In a new report on living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK, the IFS finds that young people in their twenties are still earning 7% less than before the financial crisis, yet we know that the pressures on their incomes, particularly housing costs and student fees, are higher than ever before. What are the Government going to do to help this generation that is being left behind?

Mr Hammond: We have already had this question from the shadow Chancellor. Of course, we have introduced the national living wage, which will make a difference to people on low earnings at the bottom of the income scale. Interestingly, the hon. Lady perhaps hints at something else—questions of inter-generational fairness. The Prime Minister signalled early on in her tenure of office that that is one of the areas that she wishes to address.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friends and indeed the entire new Treasury team.

With some softening of the market in house sales, will my right hon. Friend commit to looking at the data and consider whether the 3% additional stamp duty on second property purchases is necessary, desirable or indeed raises any additional revenue at all?

Mr Hammond: I can certainly commit to looking at the data, and I can tell my hon. Friend that my approach to taxation is that it is there for a simple purpose: to raise revenue for the Exchequer. I expect the taxes we put in place to achieve that.

T10. [905942] **Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): In the Queen's Speech, the Government said that they will continue to support the northern powerhouse. Why, then, of the 15 infrastructure projects with the most public funding is only one in the north?

Mr Gauke: Some of the numbers quoted on regional impact do not take into account national projects such as HS2, which clearly benefit a number of regions. Let me be clear that, as I set out earlier, we have a very large commitment to infrastructure projects in the north of England, with something like 240 in the north-west and 300 in the midlands.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As part of the west of England devolution deal, business rates will be devolved to a combined authority. Will my right hon. Friend commit to full implementation of the previous deal on business rates and recognise the importance of this deal to the regional economy?

Mr Hammond: We have no plans to announce any changes to the business rate plans that are already in place.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): The Government have announced that they are going to give £375,000-worth of banking fines to the Jo Cox fund that was set up by her family and friends to support charities that mattered to her. That fund has already raised £1.5 million in just a month. May I welcome the Government's decision to allocate banking fines to support that fund? Will the Chancellor join me in encouraging people to give to the fund, which supports the White Helmets, Hope Not Hate and the Royal Voluntary Service?

Mr Hammond: I am delighted to join the hon. Lady in making such an appeal. I am glad that the Government have been able to support this very valuable fund in memory of Jo Cox, and I am sure that members of the public, seeing the Government contribution, will now want to redouble their efforts to support it.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I add my welcome to the Chancellor and the new Treasury team.

There is a great need in the south-west to provide more high-skilled jobs to boost productivity. In order to do that, we need to attract the right businesses. In this post-EU world, could the Chancellor kindly give his commitment, much praised so far, to the A358 upgrade for those in Somerset?

Mr Gauke: I am rapidly learning that, when it comes to road programmes and other transport infrastructure projects, it is for me to respond. We remain enthusiastic about improving our transport network, whether it be in the south-west of England or elsewhere.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): Given the Supreme Court's ruling earlier this year, does the Chancellor have plans to review the Financial Conduct Authority's failure to enforce the prospectus rules in the Lloyd's enhanced capital notes case? One of my constituents has been fighting hard for pensioners, who have lost over £3.3 billion.

Mr Hammond: As indeed have constituents of mine, so I am familiar with this case from the point of view of a constituency MP. I have not yet had a chance to look at it from the point of view of a Treasury Minister, but I promise the hon. Lady that I will do so.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Given the fall in long-term borrowing costs, the ability of infrastructure investment to show that we mean business and the enthusiasm shown by the Front-Bench team, will Ministers meet me to discuss an acceleration of the dualling of the A303?

Mr Gauke: That will be me again.

My diary is filling up, and I was planning to take a summer holiday, but I may need to reconsider. I should be delighted to meet my hon. Friend.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Two infrastructure projects are critical to the north-east: increased airport capacity at Heathrow, and

an expanded Metro system. What funding commitment can the Government make to those projects today?

Mr Gauke: As I think has been made clear, a statement on airport capacity in the south-east will be made in the autumn. As for the Metro, I cannot add much to what I have said before, but the Government obviously want to support transport infrastructure throughout the country, and are looking at all good projects.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry to disappoint remaining colleagues, but we have had 20 topical questions, and we must now move on.

Turkey

12.35 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on recent developments in Turkey.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Sir Alan Duncan): I thank the hon. Lady very much for applying for the urgent question.

As Members on both sides of the House will have seen from events unfolding on their television screens, it became clear on Friday evening that a military uprising was under way in Turkey. In plain terms, it was an attempted coup, which we condemn unreservedly. It was ultimately unsuccessful, and constitutional order has been restored, but 210 people have reportedly been killed, and some 1,400 injured. I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing our sympathies and condolences to the people of Turkey on the tragic loss of life.

Her Majesty's Government have, of course, been closely engaged throughout the weekend. Foreign and Commonwealth Office consular staff worked tirelessly throughout Saturday and Sunday to support British nationals who have been affected, and they continue to do so. We have thankfully received no reports of British casualties. Our advice to British nationals remains to monitor local media reports and to follow FCO travel advice, including the advice provided by our Facebook and Twitter accounts.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister spoke to President Erdogan last night. She expressed her condolences for the loss of life, and commended the bravery of the Turkish people. She underlined our support for Turkey's Government and democratic institutions, stressing that there was no place for the military in politics, and also underlined the importance of our co-operation on counter-terrorism, migration, regional security and defence.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was regularly updated by officials as events unfolded. He visited the teams in the FCO's crisis centre who responded to Nice on Friday morning, and visited those responding to Turkey on Saturday morning. He spoke to his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, on Saturday to express our concern and our support for Turkey's democratic Government and its democratic institutions, to urge calm, and to encourage all parties to work to restore democratic and constitutional order quickly and in an inclusive way. Her Majesty's ambassador in Turkey has been in constant touch with his Turkish counterparts. I spoke to him myself yesterday, particularly in order to express our concern for the welfare of embassy staff, and I plan to visit Ankara tomorrow.

The Foreign Secretary attended the Foreign Affairs Council yesterday, and participated in a discussion about Turkey. There is a strong sense of common purpose between us and our European partners. The Foreign Affairs Council has issued conclusions strongly condemning the coup attempt, welcoming the common position of the political parties in support of Turkey's democracy, and stressing the importance of the prevailing of the rule of law and its rejection of the death penalty.

The Turkish Government now have an opportunity to build on the strong domestic support that they gathered in response to the coup attempt. A measured and careful response will sustain the unity of purpose which we have seen so far, and which was so evident on the streets of Istanbul and Ankara. The United Kingdom stands ready to help Turkey to implement the reforms to which it has committed itself, and to help the democratically elected Government to restore order in a way that reflects and supports the rule of law.

Emily Thornberry: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his answer, and may I take this opportunity to welcome him to his new position? It is unfortunate that he and his team have had to be brought to the House and did not think it right to make a statement themselves. I hope that the emergency landing at Luton of the right hon. Gentleman's boss is not a bad omen, but we do wish the all-male ministerial team well at this crucial time.

Turkey is of pivotal cultural, political and strategic importance to the world, straddling as it does the east-west divide with borders to eight countries. It is a vital NATO ally and has important minorities, particularly Kurds and Armenians, as its citizens. Half a million people of Turkish or Kurdish descent live in the UK and they are desperately worried about their families. With 2 million British visitors a year, Turkey is greatly loved in this country, and the interests of our two countries cannot be separated.

How many British citizens have been arrested, if any, and what support is being provided to them? What is the current advice to British nationals within Turkey and to those who may be booked to travel over the next few days and weeks?

On Friday we saw the Turkish people, whether they supported the current Government or not, coming out to support democracy and making a clear statement that military coups have no place in modern Turkey. The question is whether President Erdogan will use this as an opportunity to deepen and strengthen democracy or to undermine it. The signs so far are deeply worrying, with 9,000 police officers and a third of the generals dismissed, 7,500 people arrested, including the most senior judges in the country, and the death penalty being introduced.

What reassurances has the right hon. Gentleman had that there will be fair trials for those accused of complicity in the attempted coup? Was the Foreign Office taken by surprise by this attempted coup? How big is the Turkish team in the Foreign Office? Does he have plans to expand it? What will happen to this vital ally—what will happen next to this partner, this friend? It is vital that we work together to ensure that Turkey has a secure foundation of democracy, freedom of speech and human rights into the future.

Sir Alan Duncan: I thank the hon. Lady for her warm welcome—to me at least—but I respectfully point out to her that the noble Baroness Anelay, who is also a Minister of State at the Foreign Office, was, when I last spoke to her, a woman. From a personal point of view, may I point out that I am also able to add to the spectrum of choice the hon. Lady would like to see in our ministerial team? [*Interruption.*] I might say to the

hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that he, of all people, should be aware of how exactly I add to that spectrum.

I am not aware of any UK citizens having been arrested, but obviously that is a very serious consular objective for us to pursue, find out and make sure that it remains the case. I think the whole House will agree with the hon. Lady's point about the importance of wanting the due process of law to be upheld, and for any trials, should they happen, to be fair, and to make sure that the highest principles of democratic standards are upheld, for which of course one needs a functioning and independent judiciary.

I will be discussing all these matters when I go to Ankara tomorrow, and I very much hope that in the reaction Turkey displays to this coup attempt it will be able to remain a very important member of NATO and a partner to other countries in Europe. The answer to the hon. Lady's straightforward question about whether we were taken by surprise is, yes; I am not sure there is anybody who was not.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The Prime Minister appears not to have mentioned the arrest of nearly 3,000 members of the judiciary in her conversation with the Turkish President. It seems a rather strange way to uphold the rule of law, and *The Independent* is reporting today that NATO's leadership has made it clear that a commitment to uphold democracy, including tolerating diversity, is one of the four core requirements for members of the alliance. Is that the position of Her Majesty's Government?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and indeed Secretary Kerry made similar such comments yesterday. As I have just said, retaining an independent judiciary, which will of course require judges working to apply the due process of law, is absolutely essential if we are to see the standards we wish to see upheld in Turkey. I note what my hon. Friend says about NATO. Turkey remains an important ally within NATO and a very valued UK partner, so we encourage Turkey to maintain its democratic institutions and the rule of law as a fundamental part of NATO's value agenda.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his place, and the spectacular late flowering of his ministerial career. We suspect that he may well be at the Dispatch Box on many occasions, substituting for the absent Foreign Secretary. We also remember the Foreign Secretary's film, "The Dream of Rome", in which he advocated Turkey's immediate succession to the European Union—an argument he later used to justify Brexit and the UK's removal from the European Union. Can we be assured that there will be no such ambiguity in the messages that now go to Turkey, and that while no responsible Government can support a military coup against a democratic Government, no responsible democratic Government engages in the suppression of civil liberties, the persecution of minority communities such as the Kurds, the imprisonment of thousands of people, the suspension of parliamentary rights, and the reintroduction of the death penalty? Will the Minister make it clear unambiguously to President Erdogan that it is not only membership of the European Union that is at risk from such actions, but also NATO membership?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his description of me—I had never quite seen myself as a hardy perennial in quite the same way. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who has been described as absent, is working furiously. Having been to Brussels already he is due to go to Washington, and he is meeting many European Foreign Ministers today in advance of meetings on Syria and Yemen. It is ill-judged of the right hon. Gentleman to criticise him for deputing me to answer this urgent question.

Alex Salmond: It's his job.

Sir Alan Duncan: Well I have a job too, which I hope I am doing to the satisfaction of the House as the Foreign Secretary's deputy. Turkey's accession to the EU is clearly a long way off, and it is far too soon after events to start making long-term judgments about it. Some might think that it is less of a matter for the UK than it was before 23 June.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend may know that 41 students from the Arthur Terry school in my constituency were caught up in the airport, together with seven members of staff. Thanks to the outstanding leadership of the headteacher, Neil Warner, and the senior member of staff on the team, Sue Bailey, who showed excellent and responsible leadership in extraordinarily difficult circumstances, all 48 were able to leave at 1 o'clock the following morning, and head to South Africa where their school is twinned with the Rondevlei school. Through my right hon. Friend, may I pay tribute to the outstanding service that the Foreign Office provided to my 48 constituents, and in particular to Matt Jordan, a Foreign Office official who was in the airport at the time and who rendered full Foreign Office and consular services to all my constituents in an outstanding way?

Sir Alan Duncan: My right hon. Friend is always fully on top of anything that affects his constituents in Solihull, and I know that on this matter he was closely in touch with them. I completely share his commendation of the initiative and leadership—

Mr Speaker: Or even in Sutton Coldfield.

Sir Alan Duncan: I beg your pardon. Yes—it is important that I get my geography right, and not just in the United Kingdom. What those teachers did was absolutely commendable, and the natural thing is for the Foreign Office to send people to an airport, which is a natural hub, in response to a sudden outbreak of concern. I am full of praise for the manner in which staff in our embassy reacted so promptly and with such initiative to the sudden and unexpected military uprising.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Yesterday, I and my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) met the chairman of the British Alevi Federation. It raised deep concerns with us about the tension that has been rising in the largely Alevi and Kurdish populated neighbourhoods, due to attacks and demonstrations by apparently pro-Erdogan supporters. Many of my constituents have heard frightening reports from friends and family in Turkey who fear that they are being targeted. Will the Minister impress on President

[Joan Ryan]

Erdogan, and on whoever he meets tomorrow when he goes to Turkey, the need to ensure as far as possible the safety and protection of all citizens, especially ethnic and religious minority communities who feel vulnerable at the moment?

Sir Alan Duncan: I appreciate the concerns that the right hon. Lady has expressed. It is important that the leadership of Turkey includes all its citizens in the same climate of proper human rights and fair treatment within that country.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. He has formidable diplomatic and business experience, and he will add strength to a formidable Foreign Office team. President Erdogan used social media in the difficult hours immediately after the coup attempt was launched to rally the support of the Turkish people against the illegal attempt to seize power. In the past, however, the Erdogan Government have been restrictive in their approach to the use of social media by their people and critical of press freedom. Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to ensure that President Erdogan and his allies appreciate that press freedom and freedom of speech are among the values that those behind the coup wished to crush and that he should seek to uphold?

Sir Alan Duncan: I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments about my appointment. He is absolutely right to say that freedom of speech and freedom of the media are essential to the proper working of any democracy and indeed of any country. He is also right to say that the use of social media on this occasion proved very useful for quelling the uprising. I am sure that the irony of what he has said will not be lost on many people.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Some of us have always been sceptical about the suitability of Turkey as a safe country to which refugees could be returned under the EU deal. Can the Minister confirm that that EU deal is kept under review? Will he also impress upon the Turkish Government that the continuation of the deal, and the many advantages that stand to go to Turkish citizens under it, will be judged according to their response to human rights in particular?

Sir Alan Duncan: The UK is committed to the successful implementation of the EU-Turkey migration deal, which I think is what the right hon. Gentleman was referring to. We have seen no indication that the treatment of refugees in Turkey has been affected by the recent events. We will of course continue to monitor developments closely, but we want to see the deal continuing to work properly.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his return to the Front Bench in a role to which he brings considerable expertise and experience. Hon. and right hon. Members have rightly focused on the geopolitical and political implications, and the implications for UK nationals, of events in Turkey, but will he acknowledge that UK embassy staff in Ankara and the consular staff in Istanbul have played and continue to play a huge role in managing the

implications of those events? Can he update the House on the situation and safety of our diplomatic and consular staff in Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. All our staff in Ankara and Istanbul will be grateful to him for raising this topic. One of the main reasons that I wish to visit Ankara tomorrow is to reassure the staff of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. They had a shocking and unpleasant experience when suddenly, out of the calm, jets were overhead, shooting, and they heard the sound of explosions very near to the embassy. Some of our staff were separated from their children. For this to happen so suddenly and in such circumstances is a traumatic experience, and I consider it important as a Minister to exercise a proper duty of care. It is therefore perhaps my top priority to do that when I go to Ankara tomorrow.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): There are still some questions about the origins of the attempted coup that took place last Friday evening. It is encouraging, however, that all the opposition parties in Turkey, however critical they might be of the Turkish President—they certainly are critical of him—made it clear that they were totally opposed to any military dictatorship and that military government was not the answer to Turkey's problems. Would it not also be useful if the Government here made the Turkish authorities, and particularly the President, aware of the fears that the Turkish Government, led by the President, will use what occurred on Friday as a means of exercising further repression and arresting people who were in no way involved in the coup? It is difficult to understand why 2,700 judges have been arrested, for example. How could they have been involved, directly or indirectly, in what happened last Friday?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is not entirely clear exactly who was behind the coup attempt, but I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's concern about the breadth of the reaction and the rounding up of a lot of suspects. However, we do not want to speculate beyond that. I should like to make it clear to the House that the Prime Minister said yesterday:

“We call for the full observance of Turkey's constitutional order and stress the importance of the rule of law prevailing in the wake of this failed coup. Everything must be done to avoid further violence, to protect lives and to restore calm.”—[*Official Report*, 18 July 2016; Vol. 613, c. 559.]

I would add that we are watching closely to see that proper due process is applied in Turkey.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I represent a borough with a significant Turkish-speaking community, and on behalf of my constituents I should like to express solidarity with the Turkish people at this difficult time. What is the Government's assessment of the alleged involvement of the Fethullah Gülen movement in the coup? What is the Minister's understanding of the involvement of and links to that movement in this country?

Sir Alan Duncan: It is far too early to say, although we quite understand that Gülen's name has been in the spotlight and that Turkey has applied to the United States for his extradition. That is of course a matter for Turkey and the United States. However, it is important,

as my hon. Friend has said, to understand that people living in the UK who have friends and family in Turkey will have concerns, and we need to issue reassurance to them that Her Majesty's Government are taking a proper interest in what has happened in Turkey and are fully engaged in trying to ensure that calm will prevail there.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): The Minister has rightly stressed the importance of Turkey as a significant NATO ally. Will he tell us what efforts are being made through the institutions and organisms of the NATO alliance to make it clear to the Turkish Government that democratic norms and adherence to the rule of law must be upheld?

Sir Alan Duncan: I imagine that pretty well every NATO country will have been in touch with Turkey. Of course we want the conduct of the Turkish Government to be fully compatible with membership of NATO, and NATO has its own standards and democratic requirements, to which we want to see Turkey fully adhere.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): As a member of the Council of Europe, I was in touch with Turkish MPs over the weekend. Turkey plays a vital role in the Council of Europe. What practical support will the UK Government give to Turkish MPs to help them through this crisis?

Sir Alan Duncan: Again, it is difficult to say at this early stage. However, I hope that our clear voice has been heard. One of the things that we have rightly said, and which the hon. Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) pointed out a moment ago, is that we welcome the fact that all the parties in Turkey have joined together to make it clear that they condemn the coup and that they wish to see democratic institutions prevail in Turkey. That echoes our own thoughts and beliefs, and I hope that our influence as diplomats and on the world stage can continue to encourage Turkey to step in that direction.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I warmly congratulate the Minister on his resurrection in all his glorious diversity. I am glad that he referred to consular staff in particular, because it was only in 2003 that the British consul general in Istanbul was murdered in a terrorist attack there. It has been our long-standing policy to bring Turkey into the European family of nations, whether within the European Union or more broadly through NATO, and to ensure that it faces west as much as, if not more than, it faces east towards Russia and Iran. With our leaving the European Union, how can we ensure that we enhance and strengthen that process of encouraging Turkey and pro-European Turkish politicians to face west?

Mr Speaker: On the matter of diversity, the Minister of State and I share shortness.

Sir Alan Duncan: Perhaps that could also be translated as "brevity", Mr Speaker.

I commend the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for the reputation that he enjoys as a former Foreign Office Minister and for the concern that he always showed for those who work in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, often in very difficult circumstances. In the future, we will have bilateral opportunities with

Turkey and, notwithstanding our imminent departure from the EU, I think that any way in which Turkey can replicate the standards that we wish to see in other democratic countries across the European mainland is something that will help it to achieve exactly the objectives that the hon. Gentleman has just described.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): As my right hon. Friend said, we have an important relationship with Turkey, including our commitment to giving over £250 million in aid to support the 2.7 million refugees living there. Will the Government use that relationship to exert pressure on President Erdogan? He must not use the coup to legitimise a crackdown on all opponents of his regime, whether they were involved or not, and he must not further suppress freedom of speech.

Sir Alan Duncan: I share my hon. Friend's concern. Turkey has taken an enormous number of refugees, for which we should commend and thank it, and the plight of Syria has been partly shouldered by Turkey. The Government and everyone in the House would urge that the reaction to this failed coup does not lead to unacceptable consequences.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I congratulate the Minister on his appointment. President Erdogan has repeatedly refused to rule out the return of the death penalty in response to this event. What discussions have the Minister or the Foreign Secretary had—or what discussions do they intend to have—with the Turkish Government to make it clear that such a change of heart would be regressive and wrong?

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments. I absolutely agree with her on this rare occasion. Her Majesty's Government strongly opposes the death penalty, which is the view of all like-minded Governments. It would be a deeply retrograde step, causing incalculable damage to Turkey's standing at a time when it is important to embrace it within the world community and not see it become more isolated.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend and other colleagues to the Front Bench. We have heard today about democracy, due process and the rule of law, but we are talking about a repressive regime that has arrested thousands. Does he share my concern about the conditions that these men and women and being kept in? When he goes to Turkey, will he ensure that their human rights are respected?

Sir Alan Duncan: I assure my hon. Friend that when I am in Ankara tomorrow I will not be mealy-mouthed in saying what we think needs to happen. Human rights, not reintroducing the death penalty and the proper due process of law will of course form a large part of what we will urge upon the Turkish Government.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am glad to hear the Minister talk about the importance of the rule of law and human rights. The last time I was in Turkey I went with the Inter-Parliamentary Union to get 10 imprisoned Members of Parliament out of jail, and I am glad to say that that was successful. Many of them were from the south-east of Turkey, and the situation in

[*Ann Chwyd*]

Kurdistan—south-east Turkey—is dire with appalling conditions. The military should be reined back and human rights need to be emphasised. We have particular concerns about parliamentarians given the attack on the Turkish Parliament, and I am sure that the Minister will convey this House's concern for them and our hope that Turkey will continue as a democracy.

Sir Alan Duncan: The right hon. Lady understands the region extremely well and has a long-standing reputation for defending human rights and understanding Kurdistan, which has an effect on Turkey. I will convey her thoughts. It is important to ensure that everything that we have been talking about on human rights is properly conveyed to the Turkish Government given that the region is complicated and has some acute and difficult pressures to handle.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his role. I have every confidence in his ability to answer questions in this House on the many occasions when the Foreign Secretary will quite rightly be promoting Britain's interests abroad, which is his job.

I ask the Government to reiterate again that our commitment to democracy in Turkey is tied in with our commitment to women's rights, gay rights and the rights of Turkey's other political and religious minorities, who may well be feeling threatened at the moment.

Sir Alan Duncan: My hon. Friend is right to comment on the hard work of the Foreign Secretary. His list of important rights is something that we could apply to pretty much any country in the world, including Turkey.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on being one of the House's great comeback kings. He will definitely be able to keep the Secretary of State on the straight and narrow.

Does the Minister recognise the concern in constituencies such as mine, which has the largest Turkish-speaking population in the country, that the manner in which the west behaves towards Erdogan is frankly similar to how we behaved towards Mubarak? Erdogan is stretching democracy beyond belief—putting Syrians into Kurdish areas to dilute the Kurdish influence in his country cannot be right. Will the Minister be clear about how Erdogan treats the Kurdish minority in his country?

Sir Alan Duncan: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman says. Given the Turkish population in his constituency, I am happy to offer him a face-to-face meeting to talk through the issues. We share the same value system and will have some difficult problems to resolve in the region with a collapsed Syria and terrorist pressure on Turkey, which is not free of such pressures and must work out how to handle them. We must appreciate that the issues are complicated, and I would welcome the right hon. Gentleman through the door of my office to discuss them in person.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I welcome the Minister to his post—he will do a brilliant job—and welcome his statement in support of the democratically elected Government in Turkey. However, the international community has in the past supported

military Governments in Pakistan under General Musharraf and in Egypt under General Sisi. Is it now the position of the UK Government always to support democratically elected Governments?

Sir Alan Duncan: We obviously support democracy and all the values and rights that go with any properly functioning democratic state. It is a reality of the world that many countries are not perfect, and I hope that we can use our diplomatic pressure to improve countries and make them understand what world pressure really is. You made a comment about shortness, Mr Speaker, and I hope that means that I am able to punch above my weight as Minister of State.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): The Turkish Government have already instituted oppressive measures towards Kurdish people in eastern Anatolia, including the unwarranted arrests of lawyers, politicians, journalists and members of the public, leading to the death of many civilians—women and children—which goes largely unreported in this country's press. Will the Minister impress upon the Turkish Government when he meets representatives tomorrow that the failed coup should not be used as a pretext for further repression of democratic people?

Sir Alan Duncan: I hope that I pretty much said that in my opening remarks. The failed uprising must not lead to perverse consequences along the lines that the hon. Gentleman describes. However, when it comes to terrorist acts, we need to understand that the Turkish Government have a legitimate right to defend themselves against those who would attack them.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's well-deserved return to the Front Bench. Does he understand that it is difficult to characterise the arrest of thousands of judges as a proportionate response to an act—however outrageous? Turkey's membership of the Council of Europe must hang in the balance if it does not respect the independence of the judiciary.

Sir Alan Duncan: My hon. Friend points out the potential consequences of certain courses of action, on which it is too early to form a judgment. It is absolutely true, however, that judges are necessary for a functioning judiciary, so we look forward to seeing that there is a functioning, independent judiciary that can properly apply the rule of law.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (Ind): I welcome the Minister to his place. EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn has expressed concern that the swift round-up of judges after the failed coup indicates that Erdogan had a pre-existing list of enemies, suggesting that much of Turkey's response is predicated on score-settling. That mirrors the trends in recent years of suppression of free speech and civil liberties, of putting down political opponents and of fighting a brutal war against the Kurds. Will the Minister impress upon President Erdogan that the upholding of human rights and the rule of law is more important now than ever?

Sir Alan Duncan: Yes, I will. Three days after this attempted coup, it is inevitable that there will be lots of speculative judgments about what was planned, what

was pre-planned, whether there was a previous list and so on. It is impossible to know these things at this stage, which is one reason why I look forward to visiting, but the Government will speak out very strongly for human rights and for the equal and proper treatment of all citizens in Turkey.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his Front-Bench post. He brings formidable experience and intellect, and will serve the country well. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly annual session is due to take place in Istanbul this November. Does he agree that unless the security situation becomes untenable, that should go ahead in Istanbul, because despite the difficulties that may be ahead in where Turkey is heading, it will be far better to steer that if it stays in organisations such as NATO, rather than if it is exiled?

Sir Alan Duncan: I commend my hon. Friend for what he has just said, which is both wise and practical. One of the most important ways in which Turkey can be engaged and persuaded is through the forum of NATO. We wish Turkey to remain a full and compliant member of NATO, and I hope that that meeting continuing as he suggests would provide a powerful platform for bringing about the kind of positive developments we would wish to see.

Mr Mark Hendrick (Preston) (Lab/Co-op): Turkey is democratic, but successive elections have shown that it is becoming increasingly authoritarian. How concerned is the Minister that President Erdogan will use this coup as a blank cheque to go against any or all of his opponents? The UK is leaving the European Union but we should still be concerned that Turkey gets its wish and eventually becomes a member. Will the Minister make it clear to President Erdogan on his visit tomorrow that if the death penalty is introduced, that will totally negate any ambitions Turkey has in that direction?

Sir Alan Duncan: I believe I am right in saying that if Turkey were to reintroduce the death penalty, it would be disqualifying itself from membership or future membership of the EU, so this would be a self-defeating act and against the objective the hon. Gentleman has just described of Turkey's potentially joining the EU. I think it is fair to say I have already largely answered the other questions he asked.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend and his colleagues on their appointments. Turkey is a major NATO ally and partner, so how is it that we appear to have been completely blindsided by this military coup? What can be done with our partners to improve our situational awareness?

Sir Alan Duncan: In a troubled country with pressures of that sort, when their own Government are completely blindsided, it is probably not surprising that we were unaware that this was going to happen. I put it to my hon. Friend that there may have been nobody across the world, whatever the scope of intelligence, who had firmly predicted that this was going to happen on Friday night.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I know that the Minister will impress on President Erdogan how important it is that people get a fair trial, regardless of how serious the offence someone is accused of committing—indeed, the more serious the alleged offence, possibly the more important it is that they get a fair trial. It is difficult to see how that can happen when so many judges have been arrested. What practical help will the Minister be offering to the Turkish Government to make sure that anyone who has been arrested and is going to be put on trial gets a fair trial, in accordance with the proper rule of law?

Sir Alan Duncan: The most practical influence we can have on this is to join with like-minded countries and make our view clear collectively, be it through the EU or other forums that join together countries such as our allies in the United States. The collective and singular voice calling for upholding of the rule of law and the proper functioning of a democratic state is what we can most effectively provide at this early stage. The point about NATO has already been made. The point about the long-term objective of Turkey wanting to join the EU has already been made. I hope that bilateral discussions, the likes of which I hope to have tomorrow, will also impress on the Turkish Government exactly the point the hon. Gentleman has put to the House.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Minister on his appointment. Will he say a little more about the fact that, as we know, human rights abuses against the Kurdish people have been increasing over time, and that the Kurdish people play such an important role in the fight against Daesh? Will he point that out in his conversations tomorrow? What more will he be saying about it?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Lady raises a very important point, because the UK and Turkey work in a close partnership to prevent extremist travellers from reaching Iraq and Syria, involving practical co-operation between our police and security forces. We want that to continue and we hope that it will, and we stand ready to help Turkey in any way we can during this difficult period.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): The Minister referred to constitutional order being restored, but we know that in President Erdogan's hands that is a dark and elastic concept, as the experience of religious, ethnical and regional communities, of journalists, of parliamentarians and of rights activists shows. If the Government are going to communicate strongly to the Turkish Government that this coup should not be used as an excuse for a carnival of repression, will he reinforce that by direct engagement with the democratic opposition in Turkey and with legitimate rights activists there, too?

Sir Alan Duncan: The UK's policy is to engage across all parties within Turkey. The hon. Gentleman should be aware of the EU Foreign Affairs Council statement yesterday, which condemned the coup and welcomed "the common position" of all "the political parties in support of Turkey's democracy."

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): One aforementioned irony of this situation is that the Foreign Secretary published a scurrilous poem about President Erdogan.

[Kevin Brennan]

That is one of the glories of our democracy, but is the serious point not that, currently, if someone published a similar poem in Turkey they might be subject to arrest? What are the Government going to do to ensure that free speech is preserved, even in the current situation?

Sir Alan Duncan: Exactly as I have been explaining for nearly an hour now, we have to apply the maximum and optimum diplomatic pressure we can, both bilaterally and multilaterally, and we will continue to do that. This is often about relationships and persuasion; I once teased the Foreign Secretary, but I am happy to say that we are getting on extremely well.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I warmly congratulate the Minister on his new and elevated role. What discussions has he had with colleagues in the Department for International Development to ensure the safety of and provisions agreed for refugees, including humanitarian aid arrangements?

Sir Alan Duncan: We speak regularly to people in DFID, and I used to be a DFID Minister. I have not had any direct conversations, as I have been in this job for only 48 hours, but prompted by the wisdom of the hon. Lady, I assure her that I shall do this at the earliest opportunity.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I, too, congratulate the Minister on his appointment and thank him for his statement. There was much concern about human rights abuses in Turkey before the attempted coup. During the recent coup there have been documented attacks on Christian churches in Trabzon and Malatya. Will he

draw to the attention of the Turkish Minister tomorrow the persecution of Christians and ethnic minorities, and the attacks on their property and on them in Turkey?

Sir Alan Duncan: We strongly encourage Turkey to continue to work towards the full protection of fundamental rights, especially in the areas of minority rights, freedom of religion and freedom of expression. We will continue to do that, and I fully take on board the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to protect Christians in Turkey.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I, too, add my warm congratulations to the Minister on his appointment and express my hope that he will bring an enlightened perspective to some aspects of our foreign policy. At 4.30 today I was due to meet Garo Paylan, a Member of the Turkish Parliament for Istanbul and a leading member of the HDP, the principal social democratic opposition party. Obviously, he has been unable to make that meeting, but he has relayed to me his extreme concern that many members of that party are now being rounded up and detained by the Turkish authorities, despite having nothing whatsoever to do with this attempted coup. May I therefore ask the Minister to make it specifically clear to President Erdogan and the Turkish authorities that this country will not tolerate the repression of democratic opposition parties in that country, whose only misdemeanour is to fulfil their constitutional duty to criticise the Government?

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman speaks passionately and forcefully on this matter, and I fully understand what he is saying. This is why our ambassador and all of our embassy team are closely watching exactly what is happening to democratic parties, and we are engaging with them across the spectrum of political involvement to make sure that we know exactly what is going on and can make our voice heard accordingly.

Points of Order

1.20 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During the urgent question, it was implied, at least from the Tory Benches, that the Foreign Secretary was abroad, representing this country's interests—*[Interruption.]* Yes, it was. Is it possible that we could fit a locational device to the Foreign Secretary—a Boris beacon—which would tell us when he is and when he is not available to join us here in the Chamber?

Mr Speaker: I am bound to say two things to the right hon. Gentleman. First, I am no great enthusiast for over-zealous surveillance. Secondly, within whosoever competence the matter might fall, it is not a prerogative of the Chair, but I have a sense, and I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will not take exception to my saying this, that on this occasion his inquiry was substantially rhetorical, and he was more interested in what he had to say to me than in anything that I might have to say to him.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you advise me how I may be able to put it on record that the House has just been brilliantly served by the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, answering all the questions that the House put?

Mr Speaker: Well! The hon. Gentleman is in some danger of rising in the House's league table of colleagues who specialise in complimentary remarks, but there is a fine line between being complimentary and being Uriah Heepish or oleaginous. May I very gently suggest that the hon. Gentleman have a word with his right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) about the dangers of over-indulgence in that regard? We will leave it there for today.

I thank all colleagues for taking part. Very sincerely, may I thank the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), for attending so courteously and with such good humour to the inquiries from colleagues across the House on that very important matter?

Income Tax (Non-Military Expenditure)

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

1.23 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require HM Commissioners of Revenue and Customs to record income tax revenues where the payee self-certifies as holding a conscientious objection to public spending on defence purposes and report to Parliament thereon; to place a duty on HM Treasury to take account of the amount and proportion of such self-certified income tax income in preparing the supply estimates; and for connected purposes.

The central purpose of the Bill is to give taxpayers who have a conscientious objection to war the right to direct to a non-military security fund the portion of their taxes that would otherwise be spent on military purposes. One hundred years ago, at the height of world war one, Britain became the first country in the world to make the legal right of conscientious objection available to all British subjects.

The Military Service Act 1916 simultaneously claimed the right to force men to die for their country, while also granting the legal right of conscientious objection in Britain for the first time. Thousands of men, including both my grandfathers, registered for exemption from military service on the grounds of conscience. Some COs, like my grandfathers, took up alternative service, such as driving ambulances and running field hospitals. Others felt that they could take no part in any activity connected to the war and they were imprisoned, but what linked them all was their absolute determination to be true to their beliefs, despite marginalisation.

Since 1916, the right to conscientious objection has been recognised in every significant international treaty. The European convention on human rights, the United Nations universal declaration of human rights and the British Human Rights Act all testify that everyone has the right to

“freedom of thought, conscience and religion”.

The past 100 years has seen immense progress in the democratisation of war. Modern wars are no longer fought with conscript armies; armed conflict relies now on professional armies and high-tech weapons. Security is supposedly maintained with the ideology of deterrence. In short, war is waged with money, rather than manpower—funded by UK taxpayers—and yesterday this Parliament voted to support the nuclear deterrent, at a cost of £30 billion.

The law, as it stands, prevents many from acting in accordance with their own conscience, as their tax money is being spent on armed conflict, which they object to on moral, religious or ethical grounds. Some equate paying for killing with doing it themselves. These few thousand people are faced with two options—either keeping their income below the taxable level, as a lady whom I met outside earlier today has done all her working life, or withholding a portion of their tax and facing prosecution and bankruptcy. There is no other alternative, and no right to object.

I thank the campaigning organisation Conscience: Taxes for Peace not War for helping me to prepare this Bill. It has been compiling a list of these modern-day

[Ruth Cadbury]

conscientious objectors, who have been writing statements of conscience, as world war one COs did before them. One of these COs, Diana Warner, said:

“We have seen increasingly brutal and far-reaching wars, massive death and displacement of civilians, untold trauma and injury to our soldiers, and environmental destruction. As a GP I work every day for the health and wellbeing of my patients, and as a taxpayer I must do the same for the security of people in the UK and elsewhere. I insist on the right as a Conscientious Objector for my taxes to be used to forge peace and not to be used on the mechanisms of war.”

If conscientious objection can be recognised in wartime, why not in peacetime, too?

Today, the rights of COs to military tax are being campaigned for across Europe, the USA and Canada. In passing this Bill, Britain would lead once again, setting a world precedent and demonstrating that we are a leader in human rights and individual freedoms. Those who object to funding war and preparation for war still want to contribute to the security of our country and the wellbeing of our world, so this Bill calls for a mechanism for COs to fund non-military peace-building and conflict prevention initiatives, which would contribute to national security while allowing individuals to pay their taxes with a clear conscience.

By permitting the right to invest in peace rather than war, we are not only granting an individual freedom, but making a substantial step in the direction of a more effective and humane foreign policy. There are two possible destinations for this hypothecated tax.

The first is the Department for International Development, which is highly regarded internationally for the promotion of social justice. This Government’s commitment to supporting DFID is commendable. The second possible destination is the less well-known conflict, security and stability fund, a cross-departmental fund of just over £1 billion. It was created by this Government to address the causes of international conflict.

If Britain were to pass this Bill, the UK would make the hard-won right of conscientious objection relevant to today’s society by granting people the right not to pay for someone to kill on their behalf. We could also take a lead in helping to redefine the common understanding of security. Genuine, long-term security is achieved not with ever more sophisticated weapons and increased spending on “defence”, but by co-operation, negotiation, and shared understanding of the problems that face humanity—poverty, ill health, and environmental degradation.

I now wish to move on to address some common objections to a Bill of this type. First, the Bill is not seeking exemption from paying taxes but allows COs to

pay their fair contribution towards national defence with a clear conscience by investing in non-violent alternatives to war and weaponry. COs would rather invest their fair share in longer-lasting and more sustainable means of conflict resolution and prevention.

Secondly, on the criticism that the Bill introduces hypothecation, is not the Government’s sugar tax, to be spent on sports provision for young people, a form of hypothecation; and what about the additional tax on insurance premiums that is going to be allocated to flood prevention? The UK’s most significant form of personal hypothecation would appear to be Gift Aid, which redirects personal income tax towards a named charity. This sum amounted to £1.19 billion in 2014-15. Gift Aid is already widely used by taxpayers to direct funding to charitable causes.

Some say that the Bill would create a precedent for other pressure groups to petition this House to divert taxes to their favourite causes or away from their personal dislikes—but military tax is specifically an issue of conscience, not a political preference. This principle was recognised 100 years ago by Her Majesty’s Government, and I am laying a case for an extension of that right.

Finally, there is the issue of practicality. The administration of the provision set out in this Bill would merely need a signed declaration to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs and a transfer of an already-calculated sum of money to one, named, Government-controlled fund. The calculations are already provided by HMRC to UK income tax payers as a matter of course. The destination of the transferred tax receipt would be a single fund from which moneys would be drawn for the purposes indicated in the Bill.

This Bill seeks to acknowledge the existence of conscience when spending money, in order to stop forcing people to pay for wars that they do not morally agree with and for weapons they cannot, in all conscience or reason, endorse. Let us acknowledge the rights of individuals committed to this by extending the recognition of conscience with regard to war. You get the world you pay for—let us allow the right to pay taxes for peace, not war.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Ruth Cadbury, Mr Virendra Sharma, Mr Roger Godsiff, Alan Brown, Caroline Lucas, Michelle Thomson, Hywel Williams, Martyn Day and Kate Green present the Bill.

Ruth Cadbury accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 2 December and to be printed (Bill 54).

Higher Education and Research Bill

Second Reading

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I inform the House that the amendment has not been selected.

1.34 pm

The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

As the Prime Minister said outside Downing Street last week, this Government want to give everybody, no matter what their background, the opportunity to go as far as their talents will take them, in a country that works for everyone. Our higher education institutions are crucial to giving people the power to determine their own futures. They present opportunities for individuals to better themselves—to broaden their knowledge base, sharpen their skills, and participate in the groundbreaking research that can make the future brighter for everyone.

My time at Southampton University was one of the most shaping periods of my life. I should point to my time at the Department for International Development as another of those periods. For me, the chance to go to university was absolutely pivotal to being able to make something of myself. Today, I can still point to the telephone box in Kingsbridge, Devon where I rang through to get my A-level results while we were on holiday that year. In that moment, my whole future changed for the better. I was the first person in my family to be able to go to university. I remember, after that call, going to the pub across the road to celebrate with a drink. None of us really knew what going to university would be like for me, but we all knew that it was going to be the best thing and that it would improve my life chances. Opportunity is about giving our young people the freedom to fly, and universities are absolutely central to that.

My party's record on this in government is one we can be proud of. We have taken away the limit on student numbers so that more people than ever before can benefit from higher education, and the participation rate among students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds is at record levels. We have put in place the essential funding changes that have placed our universities on a stable financial footing so that they are resourced for success, and we have protected investment in our world-class science base.

The universities that our young people attend are some of the best in the world. We punch well above our weight, with 34 institutions ranked in the world's top 200 and more than twice that number in the top 800. But there is more to do to make sure that everyone can access a high-quality university place, and in spite of the progress made, we are far from meeting our economy's need for graduates, so this Government are absolutely determined to support and nurture our universities, and to ensure that they are open to every student who has the potential to benefit from them.

The creation of new universities is an undoubted force for good, both academically and economically. Recent research by the London School of Economics shows that doubling the number of universities per capita could mean a 4% rise in future GDP per capita too. However, the current system for creating universities can feel highly restrictive, with new providers requiring

the backing of an incumbent institution to become eligible to award its own degrees. This Bill levels the playing field by laying the foundations for a new system where it will be simpler and quicker to establish high-quality new providers. I am pleased that in May the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) confirmed that the Opposition do not object to broadening choice for students by expanding the higher education sector.

These reforms, which are the first since the 1990s, enable us to maintain the world-class reputation of our higher education institutions, because quality will be built in at every stage—from the way we regulate new entrants to how we deal with poor-quality providers already in the system. I recognise that there have been concerns about the quality of new providers—that they cannot possibly be as good as what we already have. It is not the first time that such arguments have been made. The same arguments were made when the new red-brick universities were being established just before the first world war, but today Sheffield, Birmingham and Manchester—which I visited very recently in my previous role—are world-class universities. This “quality” argument was made about the 1960s expansion, but in four of the past 10 years the *Sunday Times* award for university of the year has gone to one founded in that very period—currently the University of Surrey. In 1992, it was a Conservative Government who had the vision to set free the polytechnics to enable them to become universities. Now we are making it possible for a whole new generation of universities to help us to extend access to higher education for young people across our country.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new position and look forward to working with her over, I hope, the next few years. Does she agree that one aspect of the post-war universities and the post-1992 polytechnics was that students were not asked to contribute fees in order to receive a university education?

Justine Greening: I acknowledge that the Scottish National party takes a very different view of this issue. The reality is that the choice that it has made has resulted in fewer students being able to go to university in Scotland. One in five students in Scotland who apply for, and who have the grades to get, a place cannot go because the funding is not available. The hon. Lady's Government in Scotland have made that choice, but it is not a choice that this Government want to make. We have to make sure that places are available for students who have the potential and talent to make their way in life. Putting a cap on opportunity and potential is not just bad for students; it is bad for our country more broadly.

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): First, may I congratulate my right hon. Friend on assuming her new role? She has been an outstanding advocate for greater social mobility in every role she has had in frontline politics, and I am delighted to see her in this job.

Is it not the case that, following the introduction of fees, we have seen more students from working class and poorer backgrounds go to university in England and Wales, while in Scotland educational inequality has worsened, to the extent that the First Minister of Scotland

[Michael Gove]

had to sack her Education Secretary in despair at the way in which inequality was growing north of the border?

Justine Greening: Since 2009, students from a disadvantaged background in England are 36% more likely to go to university. It is not good enough to come up with excuses and tell young people of great quality who have the grades that they cannot go to university because the Government who, unfortunately, are running the country in which they live are not prepared to take the decisions to enable funding to get to the sector and create the places that they need. We are prepared to do that.

The Bill is about opening up the sector to enable new providers to enter it and create the extra places that our young people need. There will be rigorous tests for those new providers, as well as for those that already exist, centring on quality and making sure that they have financial stability. We are interested in enhancing the world-class reputation of our universities in creating opportunity for all, rather than in expansion for its own sake.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way and offer her huge congratulations on her new role. Does she agree that the new university side of the Bill will lead us into a new era of focusing much more on gearing up our students for the workplace and on linking with business to provide the exact courses required to upskill our people for the future?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The good news is that we expect many—indeed, most—of the jobs created over the next few years to be graduate-level jobs. Our economy is creating opportunities, but we need to make sure that our young people are in a position to take them. That is part of the reason why this Bill is absolutely critical. Wherever and whatever a person is studying, part of how they are able to succeed is making sure that they get high-quality teaching. That is why we are delivering on the Government's manifesto pledge to implement a new teaching excellence framework for universities.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): May I also congratulate the right hon. Lady on her new job? I was also the first in my family to go to university. Ashfield, which I represent, has among the lowest number of 18-year-olds in the whole country going to university. The Secretary of State says that she wants to see opportunities for people from ordinary backgrounds, but how is scrapping grants for the poorest kids going to help?

Justine Greening: The bottom line is that the evidence base shows not only that more young people are going to university than ever before, but that a higher proportion of them are from disadvantaged backgrounds. As I said to the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), we do our young people a disservice if our system cannot be financed to create places for them.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Justine Greening: I am going to make some progress, because it is important that I cover the teaching excellence framework, which is at the heart of the Bill.

The framework will assess and drive up quality by providing reputational and financial incentives for success, which is a proven approach to ensuring high standards at our universities. That approach is based on what we have learned from our experience. It was a Conservative Government who introduced funding for research on the basis of quality, which is now a widely accepted way of working. The research excellence framework is regarded globally as the gold standard for institutional research. By extending that principle to teaching, we can ensure that British higher education remains in the world's elite, and that students at all universities—old and new—receive the quality teaching that they have every right to expect.

Let me be absolutely clear: the Bill does not raise tuition fees or change current procedures for secondary legislation setting the maximum tuition fee cap. That will, rightly, continue to require the same level of parliamentary scrutiny as before, and the Bill will allow the maximum fee cap to keep pace with inflation, which the last Labour Government allowed for every year from 2007. What we are saying to high-quality providers is, “You can access fees up to an inflation-linked maximum fee cap if—and only if—you can demonstrate that you are providing high-quality teaching and you have an agreed access and participation plan in place.”

The Bill allows fee caps to be set below the maximum, to reflect varying levels of teaching excellence framework awards. The providers that are not meeting those standards will have to charge fees beneath the maximum fee cap, and that cap will not increase in real terms.

Our proposal to maintain the real value of the maximum fee cap, but only for those with excellent teaching, is backed by those who know the sector best. Universities UK has described that approach as “balanced and sustainable” and argues that maintaining the real value of the maximum fee cap is

“essential to allow universities to continue to deliver a high-quality teaching and learning experience for students.”

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her appointment. I am sure that she is as shocked as I am that vice-chancellors are welcoming the opportunity to put up university tuition fees. Does she agree that many students and graduates who have gone through that £9,000 system do not feel that that level of tuition fee has been justified and that they have not seen the benefits of the decision that this House took some years ago?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. The real-terms ability of the maximum fee to keep up with inflation is enabling £12 billion of investment to get into higher education over the coming years. It is critical to make sure that students get value from the investment that they make in themselves and that teaching is of high quality. That is why the teaching excellence framework is such an important part of the Bill.

The proposed office for students is another part of the Bill that clearly shows that we are putting students at the heart of our higher education policy, as they should be. The creation of an office for students, which

will be the principal regulator for higher education, will put students' interests at the heart of regulation. It will have a legal duty requiring it to consider choice and the interests of students, employers and taxpayers, and it will look across higher education as a whole, with responsibility for monitoring financial stability, efficiency and the overall health of the sector.

The current system was designed for an era of direct Government funding of higher education when fewer people attended university. Higher education attendance is no longer a privilege of the elite. We lifted the limit on student numbers, meaning that more people than ever before have been able to benefit from a university education. The legislative framework needs to reflect that.

The office for students will create a new single register of higher education providers, replacing the current fragmented system and ensuring a single route into the sector. The simpler system means that this Bill will reduce regulatory costs on the sector and contribute to this Government's deregulatory agenda. It also ensures that the requirements are clear and fair. Only those on the single register will be able to obtain degree-awarding powers, become universities or charge fees that attract student loans. Those providers will have to comply with conditions relating to, for example, their financial stability and the quality of their provision. The office for students will have powers to impose additional conditions—for instance, around access and participation for students from disadvantaged backgrounds—on fee-capped providers that wish their students to be able to access student support.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): Let me join in the congratulations to the Secretary of State on her appointment. Why is there no duty on the new office for students to promote collaboration? The crisis that we confront in this country is around technical education, not higher education. If we want to grow the number of students on level 5 apprenticeships, we need to transform the level of integration and collaboration that exists between further education and higher education. Why is that dual-track system not being encouraged by placing a duty to collaborate at the heart of the office for students?

Justine Greening: I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, which is an important one. I want universities to continue to work hard on the ground in many of the local communities of which they are part, to encourage a pipeline through which children can come and apply. If the percentage of university students from disadvantaged backgrounds is to rise, that is incredibly important.

The right hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that an element of the Bill tackles collaboration, specifically with UK Research and Innovation, which I will come on to shortly. There will also be time to debate this in the Bill Committee. I absolutely agree with the sentiment that he has expressed, and it is important that universities engage with local communities beyond their own campuses and encourage young people.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to her new post. Before she moves off the subject of collaboration, I am disappointed that there is no mention in the Bill of collaboration with the new combined authorities, especially

those, such as the one in Greater Manchester, that are to take on some of the skills agenda. What role does she think local government and local enterprise partnerships have in making sure that higher education is part and parcel of that partnership for a better local economy?

Justine Greening: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those different parties have to work together at a local level. The University of Roehampton, in my constituency, does really great work in reaching out to our local community. As a higher education institution, it has a large proportion of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds studying for degrees. He is right about that. I am determined to make sure that the higher education sector plays its role in communities more broadly. I do not believe that collaboration necessarily has to be codified in the Bill, as he suggested, for it to happen, but I agree with the sentiments that he expressed.

Several hon. Members rose—

Justine Greening: I want to make a little more progress, because it is important that I continue to inform the House of how the office for students will work, and particularly how it will regulate providers.

If a provider breaches its conditions of registration, the OFS will have access to a range of sanctions, including monetary penalties and, in extreme cases, suspending or deregistering providers, to safeguard the interests of students and taxpayers and to maintain the world-class reputation of the sector. Our proposals have the support of those who know best, with the likes of Professor Simon Gaskell, chair of a taskforce that was established to review the regulation of the sector, commenting that

“there have been a number of significant changes to the funding of higher education and to the number of providers offering courses. Regulation of the sector needs to keep pace with these developments if confidence, and our international reputation, are to be maintained.”

Indeed, only today the University Alliance described the Bill as

“a raft that can take us to calmer waters”.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): The Secretary of State has emphasised the need for collaboration. Clause 2(1)(b) mentions

“the need to encourage competition between English higher education providers...in the interests of students and employers”. She has identified that collaboration is in the interests of students and employers, so why is she objecting to putting it in the Bill?

Justine Greening: I feel as though we are already delving into the Bill Committee debate that will no doubt take place on this clause. I welcome the House's engagement with the Bill. It is important to get it right, and we will have an important debate to make sure that it is properly structured. I look forward to the Bill Committee debate when Parliament returns after the recess.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Justine Greening: I will take one more intervention before I make some progress.

Roger Mullin: I welcome the Secretary of State to her new post, and I look forward to her future briefings on the Scottish education system being more accurate. May I provide some insight into one aspect of collaboration, which could usefully be strengthened? Twenty-five per cent. of all students who enter higher education in Scotland do so through the college sector, and many colleges are in collaborative arrangements with universities. We have 2+2 arrangements, as we call them—two years in college, and two years in university—and so on. That is something that the English system could well have a look at.

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman makes a further point about the need for universities to be part of their broader communities. It is probably worth my setting out how much I welcome the fact that the further and higher education briefs are now part of a broader Department for Education brief, which makes us well placed to look across the piece at how the institutions that help to develop our young people's talent and potential can work effectively together, as well as with broader communities.

Thanks to the reforms we introduced in the last Parliament, the entry rate for young students from disadvantaged backgrounds is at a record level. In the final year of the last Labour Government it was around 14%, and today it stands at almost 19%. But we need to go further. As the Prime Minister said last week, this Government

“will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.”

This legislation supports the key principle that higher education should be open to all who have the potential to benefit from it, but this has to be about more than just accessing opportunity. Although application rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at record levels, we want to ensure that those students are supported across their whole time at university. Too many disadvantaged students do not complete their courses, for various reasons, and universities can and must do more to help them to get across the finishing line. That will allow them not only to gain the degree that they set out to get, but to reap the career rewards of doing so.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State on her new position. What does she think is an acceptable level of debt for a graduate?

Justine Greening: We need to look at the level of tuition fees that has been introduced, the rate of applications from disadvantaged students, and the number of disadvantaged students who are going to university. Those young people are taking a decision to invest in themselves, and they believe that it will offer value for money. The Bill will enable us to strengthen that decision by underwriting the teaching in universities with a teaching excellence framework.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to her position, and I look forward to working with her. We have had much discussion of disadvantaged young people, but how will she encourage participation among mature disadvantaged groups, particularly women? There has been a large drop-off in

the number of women part-time students. What progress can we make in that area, particularly in the teaching, nursing and caring professions, which women often go into after they have had their families?

Justine Greening: There are two areas in which the Bill can particularly help. First, it will provide transparency and give us a clearer sense of who is entering and going through our university system. One of the functions of the office for students will be to improve transparency, which will help us not only to improve access but to widen participation. Secondly, some of the financing changes will free up opportunities for people who find it harder to go to university because they cannot get the finance for a course. The Bill will allow us to take those two steps forward.

We are going further than Labour ever did to strengthen access agreements. Under the Bill, institutions wanting to charge tuition fees above the basic level will have to agree plans that look at participation as well as at access. We want to ensure they are doing everything they can to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds throughout their course to reduce the number of drop-outs and help all students into fulfilling careers.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): I join other hon. Members in welcoming the Secretary of State to her new post. On enabling students to access higher education, there is one group that has not been able to access it—Muslim students whose religious beliefs prevent them from taking out a loan. I know she will point to the new provisions in the Bill on sharia-compliant loans, but why does she believe that this specifically requires legislation? Many of these students have been waiting years, if not decades, to be able to go to university. Why is she making them wait even longer?

Justine Greening: The Bill puts in place the powers that we need to take a more flexible approach to funding. As the hon. Lady says, some students are less likely to want to take out a conventional student loan. We need to respond to that if we are to widen participation, and that is precisely what the Bill does. It will actually achieve the aims she talks about.

We will have transparency, which will require higher education institutions to publish application, offer and progression rates by gender, ethnic background and socioeconomic class. Across all its functions, the office for students will have to take into account the need to promote equality of opportunity across the whole lifecycle for disadvantaged students, not just access.

Academic autonomy is the bedrock of success for our higher education sector. The Bill introduces measures to safeguard the interests of students and taxpayers, while protecting academic freedom and institutional autonomy. It enables the OfS to be independent of Government and the sector, as a regulator should be. It will be an arm's length non-departmental public body, just as the Higher Education Funding Council for England is now.

The office for students will operate a risk-based approach to regulation by concentrating regulation where it is needed and ensuring the highest standards are maintained across the sector, while reducing the regulatory burden

on the best performing institutions. If a university is doing well, it should not have to worry so much about bureaucrats peering over its shoulder.

However, one important aspect of such risk-based regulation will be a more flexible approach to degree-awarding powers. We will move away from the one-size-fits-all approach, which currently requires smaller, specialist institutions to demonstrate that they can award degrees in any subject, and requires new providers—including some of the very best overseas institutions—to spend four years building up a track record in England, irrespective of a long record of excellence elsewhere in the global academic world.

The provision to vary degree-awarding powers will enable specialist institutions to gain such powers only in the subject areas in which they have an interest or a need. It will enable the office for students to give degree-awarding powers on a probationary basis to institutions that can clearly demonstrate their capability and have a credible plan to ensure they meet the full degree-awarding powers criteria after three years. As part of that, the OfS will require clear and robust protections for students when granting probationary degree-awarding powers.

Liam Byrne: The Secretary of State is being characteristically generous in giving way. Is it her expectation that many of our great further education colleges that are already providing higher education will be able to acquire their own degree-awarding abilities, in a much more generous way than is currently possible, as a result of this change?

Justine Greening: Broadly, the rule that 55% of students need to be studying on degree courses will remain. In the end, however, what we are trying to do more broadly with these changes is to open up the chance for new high-quality institutions to join existing high-quality institutions in our higher education sector in being able to offer degrees.

Wes Streeting: The Secretary of State is being very generous in giving way for a second time. She may not have seen the policy advice, but a briefing was caught on a long-lens camera outside No. 10 back in April. It said that the Government's plans risk

“creating poor quality provision for marginal students”.

What is she going to do to mitigate that risk?

Justine Greening: The Bill is about ensuring that we have a strong, robust, successful, innovative and high-quality higher education sector for Britain's young people. The hon. Gentleman sets out problems and then suggests we should not bring forward a Bill to tackle them.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): It strikes me that the Secretary of State is giving a lot of good detail on the safeguards, which should satisfy most reasonable people. Others may feel there is something of a closed shop on degree-awarding powers, and I am very glad that the Bill will, among other things, do its best to break it down. Such a closed shop is unacceptable, particularly in relation to global education provision, which, as she says, we benefit from and can push out to other parts of the world.

Justine Greening: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. For the many institutions that have spent years working steadily to get their own degree-awarding powers, these changes will be welcome. They should not have to wait so long, and once the Bill is passed, they will not have to do so.

Mark Field: I suspect institutions that have spent many years trying to get degree-awarding powers and have not quite got them will feel that they have spent a frustratingly long time doing so. None the less, I am sure this provision will be welcomed in the years to come by many of the institutions she is talking about.

Justine Greening: I am sure my right hon. Friend is right.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab) *rose*—

Justine Greening: I will make a bit more progress, because I recognise that many hon. Members want to contribute to this debate. I will give way in a second, but it is important that I briefly set out for the House how the OfS will be able to act when students and taxpayers are not well served. When there are grounds to suspect a serious breach of a provider's conditions of registration or funding, the office for students will have the power to enter and search a higher education provider, subject to the crucial safeguard that a court warrant must be obtained first.

Mr Cunningham *rose*—

Justine Greening: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman because he has been trying to catch my eye, but I must then try to make some progress on this long Bill.

Mr Cunningham: I have two universities in my constituency. What did the Secretary of State mean when she said that other institutions can share in these changes? I was not clear what she meant.

Justine Greening: I was talking about the changes to degree-awarding powers. For institutions that may currently feel they cannot go down this route because it is simply too complex and long-winded, we will open up the sector to enable great institutions to step up to become, over time, an institution that awards degrees directly and then for excellent institutions to become, after a further three years, a university. This is important for Britain. If we are to be a country in which our young people have the number of places they want at high-quality institutions, with the range of different degrees that they want and that our economy needs, it is important to have a higher education sector that can respond and that is what the Bill seeks to address.

The Bill enables the OfS to require registered higher education providers to have a student protection plan in place. Students will want to know what to expect from their providers if their course of study cannot be delivered. Although some providers currently have student protection plans, the new requirement means that students of all registered providers will be protected.

This Government believe that no one with the necessary ability should be denied a place at university. That is why, for the first time ever, we are providing direct

[*Justine Greening*]

financial support for those undertaking postgraduate masters study. We also intend to extend direct financial support to postgraduate doctoral study and to introduce part-time maintenance loans comparable to those we give to full-time students.

The Bill will make significant improvements to higher education and research, but let me reassure the House that none of these changes will be delivered by undermining other routes into highly skilled employment. We are committed to creating 3 million apprenticeships by 2020, and the Government recently launched the skills plan, which is our response to Lord Sainsbury's independent review of technical education, setting out an ambitious overhaul of the post-16 skills system. Taken as a whole, those changes will allow young people to make well-informed decisions about their futures, giving them every opportunity to achieve their potential and, at the same time, improving the quality, relevance and value of learning.

I have talked a lot today about teaching and students, but the UK is also a world leader in research and innovation. Established and emerging economies alike look on in envy not just at the quality and breadth of our research, but at our incredible track record of turning innovative ideas into life-changing, marketable products and services. The Government are protecting science resource funding at its current level of £4.7 billion, which will rise in cash terms every year for the rest of the Parliament. At the same time, we are investing in new scientific infrastructure on a record scale, delivering on the £6.9 billion science capital commitment in our manifesto.

Few people understand the research landscape better than the Nobel prize-winning geneticist Sir Paul Nurse. Aside from being an inspirational example of how social mobility can happen in our country, last year he completed an independent review of our seven research councils, recommending that the seven existing bodies be brought together into a single body. The Bill will make his recommendation of

“a formal organisation...which can support the whole system to collectively become more than the sum of its parts”

a reality.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Coventry University, Birmingham City University and the University of Wolverhampton recently launched a partnership to bring together their applied research and training expertise. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the measures in the Bill to implement Paul Nurse's recommendations support such innovative collaboration, so that, as she says, the public investment in our research can add up to more than the sum of its parts?

Justine Greening: The Bill will help in two ways. Not only will it naturally bring the research councils together under one umbrella organisation; it will give that organisation a much more powerful voice when developing links with the business community. I know from the time I spent in industry before entering the House that the link in Britain between academia and research and business is a strong one, but one that can be strengthened further. As we consider how our country will be successful

as we navigate through the Brexit process, making the most not only of our young people's talents, but of our most world-class research institutions and the brains within them will be key.

The Bill will bring into being a new body called UK Research and Innovation that will strengthen the strategic approach to future challenges, while maximising the value of the Government's investment of more than £6 billion a year in research and innovation. UKRI will provide a strong, unified voice for the UK's research and innovation funding system on the global stage, cementing Britain's world-leading position. UKRI and the Office for Students will work closely together to ensure that there is a co-ordinated, strategic approach to the funding of teaching and research in England.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Welsh universities have traditionally had an awful deal out of the seven research councils structure. In 2014-15, we received 2% of the total budget, whereas our population share would demand at least 5%. Does the Secretary of State think that that 2% is fair for Welsh universities, and what will the new structure do to address the situation? Would it not be better to create four research councils for the four component parts of the British state and Barnett-ise the funding?

Justine Greening: The Bill is about strengthening our capacity to do world-beating research. The money will follow where the excellence is. I have no doubt that there is significant excellence in Wales. That is why there has been significant funding for some of our world-class research that is taking place in that part of the UK. The Bill is about enabling the seven research councils to add up to more, as Sir Paul Nurse said, by bringing them under one umbrella.

The Bill will ensure that the UK is equipped to carry out more multidisciplinary research and to better respond with agility and flexibility to the latest research challenges. By bringing Innovate UK into UKRI, we will harness the opportunities across business as well, so that business-led innovation and world-class research can better come together and translate our world-class knowledge into world-class innovation. Innovate UK will retain its individual funding stream and continue its support for business-led technology and innovation.

We are protecting in law, for the first time ever, the dual-support research funding system in England—a system that many people consider to have underpinned universities' confidence to invest in long-term research and that has contributed to our well-deserved global reputation for excellence.

The formation of UKRI will provide crucial support during this period of change in our relationship with the European Union. As we face new challenges, we need a strong and unified voice to represent the interests of the research and innovation community across Government, across Europe and around the world.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Unison, the union, has about 40,000 workers in higher education institutions, which represents a great range of staff. It is very concerned, as am I, that the vote to leave the European Union has produced real uncertainty that will create challenges in terms of funding, research, staffing and students. It asks a question that I would like to put

to the Secretary of State: why is there a rush to do this? Should we not look at the new landscape, think very carefully and then decide what we should do?

Justine Greening: I do not agree with the hon. Lady, but I recognise the challenges that she talks about in making sure that the universities sector and the higher education sector more broadly come out of the process of Brexit stronger. That is why we are engaging in a structured way across Government and outside Government in sectors such as HE to ensure that we have a smart approach to taking Britain through the Brexit process. I refer her to the point that the University Alliance made earlier today about the Bill being

“a raft that can take us to calmer waters”.

The Bill is how we will provide the security, vision and direction for a strong higher education sector.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab) *rose*—

Jo Stevens *rose*—

Justine Greening: I have taken an awful lot of interventions, but I must now make some progress and allow the debate to continue.

Our universities are world class and our researchers are world beating. That is because over the years, over the decades and over the centuries, they have evolved and adapted to face the challenges and changes of the world around them—the world that they do much to study, understand and explain. We have to make the bold moves that are needed to secure their success for many more years to come. These changes are about further unlocking and unleashing the talents of our people and our best brains. I want the young people of today and tomorrow to be given every opportunity to succeed. That is why I am proud to put the Bill before the House. I pay tribute to the Minister for Universities and Science, who has done so much work to get the Bill to this stage.

The Higher Education and Research Bill will put more information and more choice in the hands of students. It will promote social mobility so that every person in this country has the opportunity to make the most of themselves. It will boost productivity in the economy as we realise our future outside the European Union. It will enhance and cement our position in the world as leaders in groundbreaking research, and ensure that students and taxpayers receive value for money from their investment in education. It is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

The Prime Minister told us last week that “together we will build a better Britain”.

I am clear that education has to be at the forefront of that. Our universities deserve the best, our students deserve the best and our researchers and innovators deserve the best, so that they can play their role in building that better Britain. The Bill will provide them with nothing less than the best, and I commend it to the House.

2.19 pm

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State and welcome her to her position. We look forward to the development of her thoughts on the subject.

The Bill has positive elements, which the Opposition welcome. The recognition and identification of social mobility as a key factor in the expansion of higher education is important. It is crucial that we create a system that works for social mobility not just for young people, but for adults. The introduction of a transparency duty for university admissions will be a good start, but more must be done.

We welcome the promise at last of an alternative student finance method, as pledged in the White Paper. We hope that it addresses the concerns of Muslim students about a lack of sharia-compliant funding. The Opposition had to press the Government hard on that issue during the maintenance grants debate in January, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) has made clear. I am pleased that, finally, it has been taken on board.

I praise the Minister for Universities and Science for his strong and consistent advocacy of the importance that the EU has had for universities in the UK. During the referendum campaign, he spoke trenchantly against Brexit, saying that

“we’re potentially confronted with a funding black hole roughly equivalent to the size of one of our world-class research councils.”

He also said that ditching membership would mean

“losing a seat at the table when the big decisions about funding and priorities are made”.

There’s the rub. The reality is that our world and the education world are utterly changed since 23 June. That makes all the concerns and criticisms that the Opposition and others have voiced on the Bill much more powerful, but we find that the Government are still groping for answers. The Bill too often produces 20th century answers to 21st century challenges. It is laced with an obsession for market-led ideology that does not reflect the realities in higher education or those of the post-Brexit world.

Mark Field: As someone who was on the same side of the debate for the 23 June referendum, I recognise the concerns about leaving the EU. However, we must look to the future. There are great opportunities. One of the great things about our higher education system is that it is focused very much on being a global operator, particularly given the strength of the English language. Therefore, there will be tremendous opportunities. It is a difficult, unpredictable and uncertain time, but none the less a time that is open for and ripe with opportunities for our best higher education institutions.

Mr Marsden: I welcome what the hon. Gentleman says and the fact that he spoke so staunchly on the part of the remain campaign. The fact remains, as it were, that the Government have not put forward a pathway. I will talk about that later.

Everything one needs to know about that obsession can be found in one small section towards the start of the White Paper, which states that

“we need to confront the possibility of some institutions choosing – or needing – to exit the market. This is a crucial part of a healthy, competitive and well-functioning market, and such exits happen already – although not frequently – in the higher education sector. The Government should not prevent exit as a matter of policy...and it will remain the provider’s decision whether to exit and their responsibility to implement and action any exit plans.”

[Mr Marsden]

Such breezy complacency and laissez-faire attitudes would be comical were it not for the dire consequences that they threaten for thousands of students and dozens of research and higher education institutions.

The Government have made great play of their new teaching excellence framework as a way of strengthening HE's offer to students. The Opposition of course approve of moves to value excellence in teaching—who could not?—and we approve of the concept of measuring teaching quality, but the lack of detail on how it will work is added to by concerns that the Government are using the TEF as a potential Trojan horse for removing the fee cap. If that happens, it could bring in its wake a two-tier system and a very damaging separation between teaching and research institutions.

We are strongly opposed to linking the TEF with fees, as are the majority of higher education institutions' respondents to the Green Paper, which is why the Secretary of State was so coy in saying that only the best people believe in it. We are strongly opposed because, in the first year, it would allow almost all universities or HE providers to charge an automatic index-linked inflation increase to students. That is particularly problematic post-Brexit, with the fragility of our economy. There are no guarantees on the level of inflation for the next few years. Therefore, students could face significant increases in fees—the Government cannot guarantee otherwise.

In any case, as the White Paper makes clear, all bets are off, because we do not know what further increases will be permitted by the second and third stages of the TEF. The University and College Union and others are deeply concerned by the lack of parliamentary scrutiny built into the TEF. By putting key aspects of the TEF proposals out for consultation separately from the Bill, the Government are denying Parliament the chance to debate the vital aspects of the plan in full. The equality impact assessments the Government have published alongside the Bill raise further questions about the devil in the details of the TEF.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the link between the TEF and fees means that universities will be made more accountable for any increase in fees?

Mr Marsden: There is no evidence for that. The point is that, if universities have a fees case to make, they should make it. A number of universities have already said—I will say more about this shortly—that they do not wish to pursue that link. It is telling that the House of Commons Library briefing says of the impact assessment:

“The material in the assessment is nearly all qualitative. The impact of few, if any, of the policies are explicitly quantified.”

The TEF in its current format will not provide assessment by course. The equality analysis states that the “TEF will recognise both part-time and full-time teaching quality” but there are no details on how that will happen. Institutions such as Birkbeck and the Open University, which teach a wide range of students from more varied educational backgrounds, have concerns that they may not be dealt with in the same way as students from more traditional backgrounds.

Rebecca Pow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Marsden: I will make progress and come to the hon. Lady presently.

Long-established institutions such as Cambridge University have said quite straightforwardly that they do not support the link between the TEF and fees. Cambridge University states:

“it is bound to affect student decision-making adversely, and in particular it may deter students from low income families from applying to the best universities”.

No wonder the Government's equality analysis had to resort to newspeak, saying that

“TEF is expected to benefit students regardless of their... characteristics”,

in an attempt to meet their public equality duty.

Mike Wood: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Rebecca Pow *rose*—

Mr Marsden: I will give way to the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow).

Rebecca Pow: As someone who has put two daughters through university and who has a son who is thinking about where to go, I believe it is essential that more focus is put on the quality of what is offered at universities. That is what the Bill fundamentally tries to work in, which I applaud.

Mr Marsden: There is absolutely nothing wrong with quality, but we have to see where the quality extends. The truth is that that is not clear in the TEF before us.

In addition to the first year, we know that only the simplest of tests will be available to allow HE institutions to obtain tuition fee increases. In essence, it is a cash-in coupon. There are no guarantees about where that will take us in fee changes in years two and three. It is therefore not surprising that the vice-chancellor of the University of Bedfordshire, Bill Rammell, who is a former HE Minister—[*Interruption.*] When the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, the right hon. Member for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr Evennett), stops barracking from the Front Bench, he might find that one or two respondents to the Bill have close connections with the Government and the Conservative party. It is not surprising that Bill Rammell says that the TEF proposal

“risks the commoditisation of higher education”,

even if the Government have had to row back from their original plans.

It took about six years in the early 2000s to get a broadly acceptable framework for measuring research quality with the research excellence framework. Simply using existing datasets and metrics in teaching such as the national student survey will not on its own do the business. The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee said that the use of metrics as proxies for quality was problematic. Although the White Paper claims that TEF awards will add up to £1 billion in 10 years, there are no cost predictions. The Government are proceeding on the assumption that there will be only one TEF assessment per university—a one-size-fits-all approach that has been criticised by a wide range of commentators,

not least at the all-party parliamentary group meeting that the Minister spoke at last December. Where is the recognition of that, and where is the strategy for finessing that assessment, which could perhaps be done by schools of humanities, science, social science and so on?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous and I do not doubt his commitment to improving higher and further education, but for the life of me I cannot understand what his argument is with the teaching excellence framework. He begins by attacking the Government for extensive consultation and then attacks the Government for being too narrow and rigid in their application. Which is it: are the Government too open-minded or too narrow-minded? Can he enlighten the House?

Mr Marsden: From a right hon. Gentleman who has demonstrated his ability to turn on not one but several sixpences in the past few weeks, I think that that is a little rich. I will, however, deal with his particular point. It is not a question of saying that we do not support the teaching excellence framework. What we are saying is, “This is the Government and these are your Ministers. Bring forward the material to demonstrate it is going to work.” So far, they have not done so.

Amanda Milling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Marsden: No, I will make some more progress.

The higher education White Paper emphasises repeatedly that the driver for the changes is that half of job vacancies from now until 2022 are expected to be in occupations requiring high-level graduate skills, but there is little clarity on what that means. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) asked earlier, does that include levels of technical professional competence? If so, why is there no strong linkage with the skills plan released by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills just two weeks ago? There is an obvious need for crossover between the skills plan and the higher education Bill, but the disconnect between them makes even less sense now that the Department for Education will be taking on skills and further education policy. If the opportunity for students at 16 and beyond to switch between higher education and vocational routes is to be real, why is the skills plan not linked directly with the HE White Paper?

A recent University and College Union survey showed that less than 10% of respondents recalled learning anything in school about higher education before year 9, or having any contact with a university. The Education Committee I served on and Peter Lampl at Sutton Trust have said for a number of years that it is imperative we give young people the aspirations they need at a much earlier age, so that they can make more informed choices about their future educational plans. I would like to see much more about that in the Bill, as I am sure would the rest of the House.

There are also huge question marks, following the changes to the mechanisms of government, about where the money is coming from. Will it all transfer over from the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy? With the existing cuts across that Department, where will the resources to implement these wonderful changes come from, especially since the Department has huge school funding issues to fix?

The Government strategy for expanding HE and skills rests on their “loans will cure all” philosophy. As we have already seen, however, that is no guarantee. Less than 50% of the money allocated to the 24-plus advanced learner loans was taken up because of resistance from older learners. BIS had to return £150 million unused to the Treasury. On top of that, students have already been hit in the past 12 months by the triple whammy of scrapping maintenance grants for loans, freezing the student loan threshold and removing NHS bursaries. That has damaged social mobility for the most disadvantaged students.

The Bill places immense faith in the magic of the market. Central to its proposals are a concentration on creating a brave new world of what the Government are calling HE challenger institutions, which are likely to be private and for-profit. Before any Government Member jumps up, let me say that we are not in any way, shape or form opposed to new institutions. [Interruption.] The Secretary of State has had her say. I speak as someone who taught for nearly 20 years in what was a new institution, the Open University, which is one of the proudest boasts of the Labour Government under Harold Wilson. We will take no lessons from Conservative Members on that. The Government propose that new providers could be given degree-awarding powers straight away. Students would in effect be taking a gamble on probationary degrees from probationary providers. Who is going to pick up the pieces if it all goes wrong? It is still unclear what resources the proposed office for students will have to police this progress. What if the problems are not picked up until students have been working for their degrees for, say, 18 months? As I have said previously, the White Paper chirruped about the

“possibility of exit being a natural part of a healthy market”,

but students are not market traders and they do not easily slip a second time into the womb of higher education when they have been let down by that new shiny market.

Cutting corners in the process of becoming a higher education provider also poses a serious risk to staff and students, and increases the risk of public money being misused. We know that in 2011 concerns around BPP and the Apollo group caused the previous Secretary of State, David Willetts, to pause a major extension. Previous expansion of private providers in other jurisdictions has already affected the reputation of their higher education systems, with reports of phantom students, fraud and low quality of education. As *Research Fortnight* argued in May:

“The government’s proposed reforms are being billed as bold and innovative but in fact they are no such thing.”

It says the wording

“proportionate for the Bill’s regulatory aspects”

is “code for light touch” and that

“instead...the UK government has instead decided to emulate a model from which many in the rest of the world want to escape.”

Encouraging universities or new providers is important, but

“the title of university needs to be seen as a privilege...not an automatic entitlement”

and,

“in the long term it is quality that is at risk if the proposed legislation becomes law.”

[Mr Marsden]

One example of a potential threat to quality, which concerns a number of universities, might be the proliferation of private medical schools. Three new medical schools will be opened in England by 2017 and possibly as many as 20 may seek to enter the market in the next few years. These schools will be able to operate free of some of the restrictions facing publicly funded medical schools, in particular around the recruitment of home, EU and international students. That will create a distorted playing field, where existing institutions are unable to expand home or international intakes without penalty. It is also feared that they will have limited engagement with research, lowering the standard of medical education in the UK.

Baroness Alison Wolf was a part of the excellent Sainsbury report to which the Secretary of State referred earlier. In June, fresh from a stay in Australia, which has had its own provider controversies, she urged caution on the back of the experiences in higher education she had found there. She said:

“The Australian experience confirms the madness of the removal of caps on enrolments. I think it is morally outrageous that we encourage young people to take out these big loans and give up years of their lives when it is increasingly becoming obvious that in some universities the average earnings of graduates is lower than the average salary of non-graduates.”

UCU added its concerns, not least about the removal of minimum student numbers from the criteria for university title. So why are we scrapping the right to confer title by the Privy Council? In the rest of the world that might be seen as a symbol of excellence and scrutiny. The problematic unfolding and development of the office for students, certainly in its early years, means it will not be able to have the same sort of international clout, and it removes the role of Parliament from either approving or disapproving the university title as a backstop.

The alternative White Paper, produced by a broad group of researchers and academics—it is a good read—has also done us a service by reminding us of the history and chequered process over alternative providers under this Government and their predecessor. In December 2014, the Public Accounts Committee robustly criticised officials from BIS for repeatedly ignoring warnings from the Higher Education Funding Council for England about the for-profit sector. In the report published in February 2015, the Chair reported that

“Between 2010-11 and 2013-14, there was a rise in the number of students claiming support for courses at alternative providers, from 7,000 to 53,000. The total amount of public money paid to these students...increased from £50 million to around £675 million. The Department pressed ahead with the expansion of the alternative provider sector without sufficient regulation in place to protect public money.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) has already referred to the famous photographed private memo casting doubt on BIS’s ability to solve this problem.

The Secretary of State talked about past objections. I think it was a recycling of something the Minister said recently to the Higher Education Policy Institute conference, although she did not go quite so far back as the Minister, who took us back to the 1820s and the “cockney universities”. When the Minister was asked what these new institutions would look like, having already had a lukewarm response from Google and Facebook, he could only say that a lot of them were interested.

The concern is for students whose institutions are forced to close. It is still unclear what resources the proposed office for students would have to police this or how affected students could be financially compensated and given a clear plan for completing their education. The White Paper says that all institutions will have an exit plan for their students, but how will it work? The Government’s own equality assessment admits:

“Ethnic minority students are more likely to come from a disadvantaged background which may mean that they cannot access the same financial or social resources as white British students in the event of a course or campus closure. We therefore expect”—

not “demand” or “will organise”—

“protection plans to have a greater impact on this group.”

Margaret Greenwood: On potential closures, does my hon. Friend agree that this is of particular concern to mature students choosing to study in universities in their immediate locality? Because they have to continue to work, support children and family members and so forth, a closure would create extreme difficulties for them.

Mr Marsden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to bring us back to the nub of the issue, which is the family circumstances of the people affected.

In those blithe phrases from the equality assessment lurks the potential for hundreds of broken careers and dashed hopes of social mobility. As serious is the reputational damage that failed challenger institutions or scandals associated with them could do to universities as a UK international brand. The Government’s White Paper was already blasé about the potential knock-on effects for UK plc of their sweeping changes. HE providers across England and the devolved nations of Britain are internationally competitive because they are seen as part of a tried and trusted UK brand. There needs to be a UK-wide strategy in place to safeguard that. As we emerge into a post-Brexit world, it will be even more vital, if we want our UK brand to shine as brightly as possible, that we reassure Scotland and Northern Ireland, especially where there remain unresolved tensions over research between UKRI and the new England-only bodies.

The Government say that the office for students will cover access and participation, but what concrete action there will be to match the rhetoric remains unseen. There remain major concerns about how quality assurance will be affected by the merger of the functions of HEFCE and the QAA. The Government have consistently undermined their own rhetoric on widening participation with cuts to ESOL—English for speakers of other languages—adult skills and social mobility funding for universities, alongside their disastrous decision to scrap maintenance grants for loans, for which we held them to account in this Chamber in January.

Peter Lampl and the Sutton Trust, who have championed that access for more than a decade, repeated their fears in their briefing on the Bill, including, specifically—this has been alluded to but the Secretary of State was unable to give an answer—the fact that English students have the highest level of debt in the English-speaking world. The figures are: £44,000 on graduation and over £50,000 for those requiring maintenance loans.

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman is being exceptionally generous in giving way. In improving access to higher education, is not improving the quality of secondary education one of the most important things? Is it not a great tribute to our previous Prime Minister and to the previous Education Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), that there are now 1.4 million more children in good and outstanding schools who now have the chance to go to university and achieve great things?

Mr Marsden: I am always happy to applaud excellence in the secondary sector, but it is a little rich coming from the right hon. Gentleman, given that he and his predecessor presided over a system in which level 4 schoolchildren were denied automatic access to work experience, which would have built up their skills and capacity to take some of these positions.

Margaret Greenwood: On quality in schools, does my hon. Friend agree that there is also the issue of access to further education, particularly adult education? I used to teach on an access to higher education course in a college for adults. When it comes to accessing higher education, that sort of provision is invaluable, particularly for people from disadvantaged backgrounds, but sadly the Bill is very short on anything to do with lifelong learning and part-time education.

Mr Marsden: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I intend to remedy that as best I can in my remaining remarks.

In the briefing for the Bill, the Office for Fair Access emphasises that it needs to retain the ultimate authority to approve or refuse access agreements. It is timely to emphasise that OfS board members should have expertise around social mobility and fair access. The Bill's introduction of a transparency duty for higher education applications is positive, but as the Sutton Trust said in May, the Government's record on improving social mobility is poor. We agree with the National Union of Students that the Government need to create a requirement for an annual participation report.

If we want the office for students to be a genuine office for students, there also needs to be a designated place on the board for a student representative. However, it is not only students who are key stakeholders but people working at all levels in our institutions, and that is why I particularly underline what Unison said about the lack of accountable strategic decision making around employers and students remaining a concern. That is something else that the OFS needs to look at.

We cannot get away from the fact that the student position is nowhere near as rosy as the Government are saying. For 20 years, the official position has been that maintenance support is not meant fully to cover the annual costs of living for full-time students. The loans are supposed to be supplemented by earnings or contributions from family. Too little attention has been paid to the other debts that students contract. The debate around increases to tuition fees is important, but the fundamental problem of sustainability also lies in maintenance support and student cost of living. That is why student dissatisfaction levels are so high and so alarming.

I turn now to the issues around the separation of regulation and funding between teaching at OFS and research at the new UKRI body. GuildHE says that it risks undermining some of the positive interaction between teaching and research. I have already set out the risks that allowing challenger institutions degree-awarding powers from day one could have on the quality of our institutions. The regulation needs to be robust, rather than just proportionate, but as I have emphasised when we debated the Government's scrapping of student maintenance grants earlier this year, FE colleges are a key driver of social mobility. They deliver more than 10% of all HE courses in this country, often to the most disadvantaged students and often in places with a dearth of stand-alone HE provision and a history of low skills in the local economy. They span the country, from the NCG in the north-east to Cornwall college and my own excellent Blackpool and the Fylde college.

Last year, 33,700 English applicants were awarded maintenance grants for HE courses at FE colleges. One would have thought, therefore, that the Government would have seen them as a key element for expansion as part of their array of challenger institutions, yet hidden away in the annex to the impact assessment for the Bill is the Government's forecast for the number of FE colleges that will be delivering HE as a result of the Bill. The forecast figure for 2027-28 is exactly the same as that projected for 2018-19, whereas other alternative providers are projected to more than double in number. It is true that the Bill will make it easier for FE colleges to get degree-awarding powers, but what comfort will that bring when systematic cuts to colleges' ESOL provision, adult skills and other areas have reduced the capacity of FE to participate in HE expansion?

In addition, many key HE programmes on which both FE colleges and modern universities rely could be scrapped if up to £725 million of EU money currently going to local enterprise partnerships is lost—money that produces jobs and skills for them and their communities and on which hundreds of courses and staff depend.

Liam Byrne: Would my hon. Friend underline how important this point is? For many of the communities we serve, further education is the critical springboard into higher education. In the great city of Birmingham, we have the grand total of just 100 young people on level 5 apprenticeships. We cannot change that number unless we radically increase the way in which further education and higher education work together. That is why this element of the Bill needs highlighting as so important.

Mr Marsden: My right hon. Friend is so right; in his previous position at this Dispatch Box, he championed that position and continues to champion it excellently today.

We and many others, including the Royal Society, have major concerns about the merger of the science councils and the consequent tensions between the new UK model, English models and the devolved Administrations. It is an issue that seems to unite many people across the piece, whether it be the former President of the Royal Society, Sir Martin Rees, who has said that the plans were "needlessly drastic"; the Academy of Social Sciences, which fears that it will lose autonomy and weaken communication with academics over future

[Mr Marsden]

research planning; or Paul Nightingale of the Science Policy Research Unit, who said that it was doubtful whether having an “extra layer of bureaucracy” would help.

We share the concerns of Cambridge University and others that there need to be stronger safeguards for dual funding and protecting the integrity of the QR. To deliver this dual support, there will need to be smooth interaction with the devolved Administrations, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Scottish Funding Council and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. However, the Royal Society and others, and indeed the director of the University of Scotland, Alasdair Smith, are very concerned about how this will operate. These changes prompted the Lords Science and Technology Committee to write to the Minister to express its concerns. It has stated that it had serious concerns about the integration of Innovation UK into UK Research and Innovation. It is concerned that Innovation UK should retain its business-facing focus, and the recently distinguished Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, now the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), also asked for clarification on this point.

The proposed changes to the departmental landscape since last week split responsibility for research and teaching across UKRI and the office for students respectively. Two separate frameworks, the research excellence framework and the teaching excellence framework, both lack links to funding.

Now, of course, there are major concerns post-Brexit about how universities are going to fund that research. At present, UK universities receive 10%—just over £1 billion a year—of their research funding from the EU. The *Times Higher Education* says that 18 UK institutions face losing more than half of their research funding as a result of the decision to leave the European Union. This affects some of our newer universities as well as long-established universities in the Russell Group. That is why Professor Paul Nurse in his research review for the Government warned that leaving the EU jeopardised the world-class science for which the UK is known.

Jo Stevens: I have three universities in my constituency—two new ones and one Russell Group university—and they are very concerned about what is going to happen as a result of Brexit. Does my hon. Friend agree that we have had no reassurance from the Government about the replacement of the funds that currently go to our world-class universities?

Mr Marsden: I am afraid that I would agree. This problem has been amplified by people such as Chris Husbands, the Vice-Chancellor at Sheffield Hallam University, who said that four out of 12 of his research projects are now in jeopardy. These are issues that affect the bread and butter of the whole workforce. We did not think that this Bill was really fit for purpose before 23 June, but the difficulties have been amplified in the wake of the funding uncertainty and instability after the Brexit vote.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Marsden: Not at the moment, I am sorry.

Now is hardly the time for embarking on three years of creative chaos, meddling with what the Bill calls the “architecture of quality assurance”, where the White Paper cheerfully says on page 61 that HEFCE and OFFA will dissolve, following the creation of the OfS. It is therefore not surprising that many universities have urged a period of stability. The Vice-Chancellor of Coventry University, Stuart Croft, has said that

“to add the demands of that Bill to those of EU exit, at the same time, will be an intolerable burden for universities that, frankly, threatens to rock our very capacity to do everything we do to promote and extend the UK’s reputation globally”.

The Chairman of the BIS Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), has recently made a similar point.

There are more than 125,000 EU students at UK universities. What is to happen to their continued eligibility to study here or access student loans? If we are seen as insular and inward looking, what does that leave us with regarding the 10% increase in domestic and EU students by 2019-20, which the Government promised in the White Paper? The Chair of the BIS Select Committee also echoed these concerns, saying that

“the government has not provided that clarity needed to reassure individuals”.

The White Paper, of course, and this Bill argue that the new challenger institutions will be central for extending that, but at a time when our existing institution brands already risk losing tens of thousands of EU students, this obsession with untried, unnamed and untested providers could undermine rather than reward the sector. We should not think that will affect only England. There are 20,000 non-UK EU students at Scottish universities and 2,700 at Northern Irish universities.

Finally, what is to happen to the future careers of some of our brightest and best students and our future workforce? During the 2013-14 year, there were 15,000 UK students on the EU-funded Erasmus programme. This is not just about economic losses, but about the potential blighting of a whole generation, brought home to me by an email the weekend after the Brexit vote from a young man in Blackpool who, thanks to the EU Erasmus programme, had just completed a year of his university course in Munich. He said:

“I’m deeply concerned about our path forward as a nation.”

The former Chair of the Science and Technology Committee pressed the Minister on Horizon 2020, but the Minister refused to be drawn on future schemes to enable EU citizens to come to work in science. Why? Because he knows that, given her Home Office stance on migration, the new Prime Minister could veto it. Regardless, then, the Government are merrily pressing on with a Bill introducing major changes that could cause further massive disruption. No wonder people are saying, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.”

The rhetoric of the White Paper is all about the mechanisms for gaining a rapid increase in young graduates, but there is little mention of the importance of adult skilling, and very little in the Bill to power it. There is a complete failure to plot any realistic lifelong learning strategy to tackle our skills gaps. We need to retrain and reskill older workers because there are not enough young ones.

There was much talk about improving social mobility by the previous Government, but little of it has touched on or benefited older and part-time students. The number of part-time students has plummeted by 38% and mature students have dropped by 180,000 since 2010. As the Open University has said:

“Part-time HE is a catalyst for widening participation. It is essential that the new government reaffirms”

their targets. The Secretary of State was quite right to talk about young people from disadvantaged backgrounds improving through part-time education, but that has not been seen for mature students, whose numbers have declined greatly.

The huge challenges are underlined by the latest survey of students by the National Education Opportunity Network, which says that

“over 40% may be choosing different courses and institutions than those they would ideally like to because of cost and restricting the range of institutions they apply to by living at home”.

This Government have talked the talk on widening participation, but they have not walked the walk. It is astonishing that in such a large Bill, they have not put centrally the importance of adult and part-time learning to improving social mobility. Instead, they tucked it away in a couple of paragraphs in the White Paper.

Speaking as someone whose passion for this area was fuelled by nearly 20 years as a course tutor in the Open University, and having cut my teeth as a post-grad with the Workers Education Association, I am proud to endorse, as is this party, an express commitment to part-time HE and adult education in the proposed general duties of the office for students. I have said previously that the worlds of FE, HE and online learning are morphing into each other far quicker than some Whitehall policy makes us realise. If we are not ahead of the curve, the consequences for our economic performance and social cohesion will be severe.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The hon. Gentleman mentions a number of criticisms of competition in the university sector, but does he not agree with Lord Mandelson, who said in his response to the Government White Paper:

“I welcome this focus on the range of universities...as they are essential for social mobility”?

Mr Marsden: Lord Mandelson and I are at one on that; I welcome a range of universities, but I want to make sure—I am sure most Members would agree—that they do what they say on the tin and can be trusted in the first place. That is the whole point of what we are saying. *[Interruption.]* I know, from a previous incarnation, that the Whips are trained to say things like that, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury (Mr David Evennett): Wait and see.

Mr Marsden: I will indeed wait and see.

The Government should take into consideration proposals in the new report that has been prepared for the all-party parliamentary group for adult education, “Too important to be left to chance”. They should study the Fabian Society’s new proposals: it recommends gradually doing away with loans via national insurance and education learning accounts. The Open University,

City and Guilds, the TUC, the Institute For Public Policy Research, Unionlearn and several other organisations have produced ideas to facilitate both credit transfer and personal careers accounts, and I have added my own thoughts. They build on the magisterial 2009 NIACE report “Learning Through Life”, co-authored by Tom Schuller and the late lamented Professor David Watson.

Knowledge is power, as shop stewards and industrial injury lawyers know only too well. Today we have an opportunity, but also a duty, to extend that power through learning to millions of workers across Britain. Lifelong learning should not be “siloed”. It contributes to social cohesion, so it is an issue for the Department for Communities and Local Government; it helps people to live longer, so it is an issue for the Department of Health; it helps to return offenders to society, so it is an issue for the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice; and it contributes to preparing economically inactive people to enter the world of work, if that is appropriate. I have laboured those points because I realise that, given the smaller budgets that the Education Ministers may have, they may have to go to some of the other Departments with the begging bowl if we are to see any progress in this regard.

Knowledge is not merely power, but the key to empowerment. We should be bold in the world of lifelong learning that we offer our citizens for 2020: we should offer practical skills along with pure knowledge. Instead, however, the Government have been content to make welcome but incremental changes, while the capacity of adult learning is unravelling further. As was pointed out earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), the Bill contains little reference to the part that devo-max can play in expanding new providers, or to the productivity and job needs of the 21st century. That fear is echoed in the alternative White Paper, which states:

“A private, for-profit university would have neither an interest in meeting a broader public remit nor the interests of the local economy in which it is located—its primary responsibility will be to its owners, investors and shareholders.”

Instead of looking at urgently needed and constructive ways of reducing the financial fees burden on our students, the Government have produced mechanisms which dodge Parliament’s ability to judge and regulate them. Instead of strengthening and shoring up our universities and higher and further education at a most critical time, they risk seriously undermining them by obsessively pursuing a market ideology. Instead of presenting analysis in the wake of Brexit, offering relief, assurances and strategies to safeguard both research excellence in our traditional and modern universities and the involvement of higher education in the local communities and economies that they serve, the Government have presented no answers to the urgent threats, such as brain drains, that are emerging post-23 June. Instead of strengthening our UK HE brand in the uncertain world in which we must negotiate post-Brexit, they have produced what many regard as a hotchpotch of structures in research and science, with unresolved tensions between new structures for England and the devolved nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. They have continually ducked the suggestions made to them about pre-legislative scrutiny to try to iron out some of these issues, although, thank goodness, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool has initiated an inquiry.

[Mr Marsden]

Given the result of the Brexit referendum and the collapse of the Cameron Government, we see how wise it would have been for the Government to reflect and take time. Instead, they are going hell for leather with a Bill that is obsessed with a toxic combination of market and competition-driven ideology. The small measures of progress and relief that they have offered in respect of social mobility could have provided an opportunity for them to paint a bold new picture of a system that would encourage social cohesion, but instead they have undermined their own social mobility agenda in the ways that I have described.

We could have had a Bill which addressed those issues, and which would have commanded wide support across the House and among the institutions that that supply HE and research, but instead, after a week in which the very structures of the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills have been turned upside down, we are pressing on as if nothing had happened. Maynard Keynes famously said:

“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?”

This is not the Bill that this Parliament needs. It is not the Bill that universities and HE institutions needed. It is not the Bill that our country needs—that our countries need. It is a Bill that is currently not fit for purpose. Especially post-Brexit, we need a Bill that will provide direction and structure, and tackle and settle the needs of a crucial part of our national life for the next generation. That is why we cannot support this Bill's Second Reading tonight.

3.5 pm

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Let me begin by welcoming the new Secretary of State to her post. It is a great pleasure to see her on the Front Bench, and I think that she has a wonderful job. When she was describing her experience of being the first member of her family to go to university, I was reminded of the fact that the same was true of me. I remember heading down from Northumberland to Nottingham, thinking that I was going fairly far south until I met students who were arriving in Nottingham, but had travelled north. I was quite intrigued by that.

I enjoyed my time at university, as did the Secretary of State. As she said, getting to university really does matter, and for those who do, it is a fabulous experience. The point of our debate today is really to ensure that more people can do it, and more can be successful.

I also welcome the creation of a large “super-Department for Education”. It always struck me as absolutely barmy that the last Government but one, Gordon Brown's Government, severed the Department and created a wasteland for post-16s. We never quite knew who was doing what, how it was being done, or who was funding it—quite apart from the fact that the link between schools, colleges and universities was effectively broken. The creation of this new Department is, I think, a fabulous step in the right direction. I remember discussing these issues with my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), and I think he would concur with what I have just said. As a former Secretary of State for Education, he is well placed to do that.

So here we are, with the right kind of Department. As Chair of the Education Committee, I am also pleased to note that I have even more to do, because the sector that we are discussing today is so very important. There is nothing more important than ensuring that the higher education sector thrives and prospers. I will give several reasons for that, but the obvious one is connected with social mobility and social justice. The brutal fact is that it is an abhorrent waste that there are people who could go to university in other circumstances but who cannot do so. That is completely unacceptable. We must have a society in which people who can, should and do want to go somewhere can go there. That is our job. It is not acceptable for groups of people, or individuals among groups of people, to be trapped.

Jo Stevens: On that basis, how does the hon. Gentleman justify the removal of national health service bursaries?

Mr Carmichael: I do think it important to attract people to the NHS. I think that today we should be concentrating on the Bill as it stands, but our Committee will certainly consider that issue in due course.

Let me return to my point about social justice and the need to extend it to all, because that is critical. In particular, we need to extend it throughout the country, to regions, areas and localities that have, in effect, been surrounded by a wall: a wall against hope, a wall against opportunity, a wall against achievement.

That leads me to my second key point. The Bill is also about productivity, because that is a critical issue as well. A society in which people can feel included, feel able to express themselves, and feel able to get the jobs and opportunities that they want must be a society that is also based on an economic, productive model. Productivity equals more opportunity, because it means people having more skills, being able to command a higher salary, and being able to do things that they could not otherwise do—so the productivity argument is at the core of why we have to improve our university sector in the way this Bill seeks.

Mr Jim Cunningham: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that productivity is also linked to research and development, in particular R and D projects with Europe? There is a concern. The vice-chancellor of Warwick University thinks that withdrawal from Europe might have an impact on some of the projects it gets finance for. Will the hon. Gentleman's Committee look at that, or has it already looked at that consequence?

Neil Carmichael: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It is essential that we have R and D, and if we look at the comparators between ourselves and other countries that we are competing with we find some areas where we could and should be doing better—so the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

I want to make a point about productivity. The important point about the German economy, which according to the OECD is 28% more productive than ours, is that businesses, companies and professions understand that human resources—people—are the things that really matter. I shall give an example to show how I know that. I once went to a car factory in Lower Saxony, east Germany. It had been built from the ashes of the collapse of the communist regime, and it was

producing Porsche cars. I asked the factory manager what the supply chain looked like, and he said, “I can show you”. He showed me the typical things from Bosch and Pirelli and all the rest, but colleges and universities—people—were also part of the supply chain. That is a very important point, because it shows that if we are really going to be productive and drive through the growth we need, we must consider the human resources. In making sure that we do so, this Bill is a huge step in the right direction.

James Cleverly: My alma mater, the University of West London, has relentlessly nurtured a relationship with the industries into which its graduates go. It tailors its courses to the needs of those industries and there is a real symbiotic relationship between the industries and the university. Is that a model we should be looking to expand across our higher education sector?

Neil Carmichael: That is a very good point and I was going to loop that in with devolution and so forth. My hon. Friend makes a powerful point: it is very important that our universities are connected to businesses and professions. I would make two further points. First, through devolution and making sure universities become dominant the partners of cities and other regions, they will be able to make those links, develop those stakeholding opportunities and contribute to the world of research and development that is so important beyond the university itself.

Secondly, we must recognise that businesses and professions have an interest in investing in universities and we should encourage them to do so both in the traditional way of supplying capital and in the most sensible way, which is supporting students to go to university, stay at university and develop research opportunities. There are steps in this Bill to make that happen, which is why I welcome it.

I like the idea that the office of students will be able to start helping to shape the new universities and create access to the degree subjects we need. That chimes with the knowledge I and everybody else now has that certain skill sectors are woefully undersupplied. We need to develop the university sector to help put that right. It is important that we develop that relationship.

I also welcome the fact that this Bill is saluting the Nurse review, which is an important contribution to the debate. I can see an opportunity for the Education Committee to have yet another hearing on who might be in charge of UK Research and Innovation, and I look forward to that given our recent experience. That structure needs to be user-friendly in the sense that it must engage with the world of research and all those interested in science, because we must remember that getting IP in the right place is important, as is recognising the value of IP and that there are sometimes questions about who owns IP and who is going to benefit from it. We need to set up a system that looks good and is able to deliver that structure.

I also want to talk about the question of destinations. We think about it all the time when we think of schools because increasingly it is destinations from schools that matter, rather than just qualifications and assessments. Destinations should definitely have a place. That is why I am pleased about the teaching framework, as I think it will help us shape the destination issue in a very interesting way.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept, however, that part of that process could be further education or regional colleges, as opposed to just universities, and that they have an important part to play in their relationship not only with schools, but with universities, so that teaching can be upgraded in some of them?

Neil Carmichael: Yes, of course I do. Colleges do produce foundation degrees, for example, and that has a logical link and extension to universities. The relationship between larger colleges and universities should be allowed to develop and be encouraged, because that is exactly the kind of fluid way in which we can address the question of getting the skills we need.

I want to end on a subject that is also critical: making sure we think about the world of education in a linear way, from start to finish. That is why I am so pleased to welcome the creation of this new Department. I wrote about it a few years ago, and hoped it would happen, and now it has. There were several reasons why I hoped it would happen. One of them is that we do need to see universities and colleges thinking more about what their relationship is with schools and academies. That is a key issue, and the direction of travel goes the other way, too. That will help us understand more about what the labour market and the skills requirements are.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend the Chairman of the Select Committee is making, as ever, a compelling argument. I want to associate myself with the point he has just made about universities and higher education institutions playing more of a role in our schools. Does he agree that the leadership shown by Baroness Alison Wolf in ensuring that King’s College, London sponsors a maths school—an outstanding new free school—is exactly the model other universities should seek to emulate, and that if vice-chancellors want to show they are committed to social inclusion and social mobility they should sponsor more free schools and academies?

Neil Carmichael: That is an interesting intervention and I was coming on to that area, because the world of education is not just boxed up into different sections; it is linear. We need to see more mixing up of people within the sector. There is value in vice-chancellors knowing more about schools and academies and in lecturers getting more involved in schools. I also want to emphasise the value of businesses and professions going along as well. That will mean we get an education system that knows more about what is needed out in the world, that is more comfortable with itself in delivering those things, and that is reaching out to the people who most desperately need to be reached out to—those whom I described as being locked into places where they should not be and being deprived of opportunity and hope. That is what we have to put right on this journey we are embarking upon with the Second Reading of this Bill.

The Committee I chair will look at a lot of issues raised by the Opposition; I have taken note of one or two of them, because I want my Committee and this House to get this Bill right, as it is an important Bill. If viewed through the prism of Brexit the Bill is even more important. Brexit is a call to arms for our education system. We will have to provide more of the skills that

[Neil Carmichael]

we need because we will not necessarily be able to rely on the European Union to do that for us, and that must be in the back of our mind when we think about higher education, or indeed about all education.

3.19 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The SNP joins other parties in having concerns about the Bill. We do not dispute that some aspects of higher education need reviewing, and we welcome attempts to increase diversity and access to higher education. The Bill aims to transform the HE landscape, but it does not go far enough in terms of diversity, and it poses a serious threat to the international reputation of the UK HE sector. To press ahead with the Bill at a time when HE is already experiencing great uncertainty due to Brexit is reckless and will cause further damage.

There are significant differences between the higher education sector in Scotland and its counterparts in the rest of the UK. The SNP is supportive of the UK Government's proposals to improve the standard of teaching through the teaching excellence framework, but it stresses the need to consider Scotland's unique educational provision. Although Scottish HE providers will not be bound by the Bill, there are concerns that by not participating in the TEF, Scottish universities will be disadvantaged when attracting international students, who are a crucial source of funding for all HE institutions.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I came to this place after working in an educational institution, and I echo my hon. Friend's sentiments about the value of international students. Does she agree that that value is much more than just financial, and that all our students will lose out if attracting international students becomes a problem?

Carol Monaghan: I agree 100% with my hon. Friend. Diversity in our institutions and what we learn from overseas students enrich the experience for all students in higher education.

International students who are considering a move to a UK university could view an English university with a strong TEF rating as offering a better experience than a Scottish university with no TEF rating. Since the TEF will be grounded in quality assurance scores, and given that Scotland has a distinct quality assurance system, recognition of Scotland's enhancement-led institutional reviews, and benchmarking those reviews against TEF ratings, would allow institutions in Scotland to continue to compete on a level playing field when attracting international students.

It is important to exercise caution around the use of metrics to judge quality of teaching. Certain metrics—graduate salary or student satisfaction, for example—can drive university behaviour in a negative way, as higher education institutions are incentivised to sacrifice certain subjects in favour of areas that produce more positive results in the criteria being measured. Courses that are more challenging and perhaps score lower in student satisfaction metrics—for example, vital STEM courses—could end up being dropped because they do not measure well on the TEF metrics. If metrics are to be used, it is

important for our economy that they are carefully honed to ensure that the degrees being taken and the skills developed still meet the overall needs of society.

We should view with caution the drive towards marketisation of the student experience. Giving the power to award degrees to new untested providers on day one is a concern if there is no clear mechanism to ensure that those providers have a track record of delivering quality courses to students. Plans that assist the entry of “for profit” providers and award them with the title of “university” will be damaging as the UK competes internationally for students. Perhaps most importantly, those new institutions, which often have no record, will compete for significant numbers of students while allowing them to cherry-pick profitable courses.

Mr Jim Cunningham: I am sure the hon. Lady knows that the National Union of Students is concerned about what we call the creeping privatisation of the university service. We could end up with a situation like the mess we have in the national health service through privatisation by the back door.

Carol Monaghan: All SNP Members share that concern, and we should be worried about the move towards privatisation of the university system.

Courses that are more expensive to deliver—again, I mention STEM courses—will be left to traditional higher education institutions that will either bear that financial burden alone or, worse still, will abandon some of the courses that have earned the UK its worldwide reputation for excellence in that field. New institutions will be allowed to operate without providing services such as libraries or student unions, which are a key part of the student experience at university. Indeed, the Bill permits competition not on equal terms with existing universities, but on substantially reduced terms. The only assumption one can make is that the new providers will put profit before students.

The Government have outlined two models, and with the “low” fee cap of £6,000 we will have universities that potentially offer lower quality provision. At the other end of the scale, the higher fee of £9,000 can further rise with inflation. Where teaching is high quality, that is recognised as a strength of an individual course, not of an institution, yet fees will be the same for all courses in an institution. Creating a system that assesses the quality of a whole institution and allows it to raise the fees for every course based on that assessment when the quality of teaching will vary across departments, is unrealistic. It will create a framework in which students could study courses of lower quality at an institution that was judged to provide “generally” high quality, yet they would, unfairly, be charged higher fees for poor-quality degrees.

Michael Gove: Like the hon. Lady I am a huge admirer of higher education in Scotland, not least because in the middle ages my home town of Aberdeen had as many universities as the whole of England. In its most recent report, the Sutton Trust revealed that Scotland has the worst record of any part of the United Kingdom in admitting students from poorer backgrounds to higher education. What is going on?

Carol Monaghan: The right hon. Gentleman makes a useful intervention because the metrics used by UCAS for higher education in Scotland consider only entries directly from school. In Scotland, however, a large number of students—particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds—take alternative routes in.

Tuition fees were trebled in 2012, but there is no evidence to suggest that there has been an improvement in teaching quality or in student satisfaction. The SNP strongly opposes any further increase in fees. We continue to support a system in which entry to university is based on the ability to learn and never on the ability to pay. We have a strong and principled record of opposing increases in tuition fees throughout the UK, and we will reject any Bill that seeks to increase the financial burden on students.

I am happy that the Secretary of State recognises that allowing the marketisation of higher education will increase the possibility of institutions exiting the market. The National Union of Students has raised concerns about the first responsibility of providers that collapse, and asks whether providers will place their responsibilities to their shareholders above their responsibilities to their students. Students might get monetary recompense when a provider collapses, but there is no recognition of the time wasted by students who start a course with an institution that subsequently fails. That time is indeed money for those students, whose careers and earning potential could be delayed while they seek an alternative provider. They are being asked to gamble with their fees and, more importantly, their time. The SNP has at its heart a commitment to higher education, and the idea of prioritising profit over education remains alien to us.

The new emphasis on participation, as well as access, is a positive measure. Plans to place a transparency duty on universities to publish data for students based on their gender, ethnicity and social background are a step in the right direction. I am also pleased that there will be scope to extend student financing to students who do not accept interest-incurring loans, thus creating a sharia-compliant manner of financing for students. But if the Government are going to meet their worthy targets of doubling the proportion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds going to university and of increasing the number of black and minority ethnic students going to university, the transparency revolution must also ensure meaningful outcomes and accountability.

Kirsten Oswald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should look closely at the interaction between the further and higher education sectors in Scotland and take full account of the way in which they work to encourage participation by groups whose participation is currently limited?

Carol Monaghan: Absolutely. Those arrangements can benefit single parents and part-time students, who are often unable to access higher education in the same way that they could in the past.

Clear measures and pathways to enable disadvantaged students to progress have been steadily eroded. The removal of education maintenance allowance and maintenance grants for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, coupled with cuts to the disabled students allowance, do not match the Government's ambitions in this area. Thankfully, the picture in Scotland continues

to improve, and positive steps have been taken to ensure that access continues to increase. Young people from a disadvantaged background in Scotland are now more likely to participate in higher education than they have ever been in the past. In 2014, 41% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to access higher education in Scotland.

Moving on to research, the commitment to a dual support system for research funding and to the Haldane principle have been widely welcomed by the research community. However, proposals in the Bill to reform the UK research councils could have implications for higher education institutions in Scotland, and we have concerns about the possible short and long-term consequences for Scotland's research base. The retention of the seven disciplinary research councils is welcome, as mergers or changes to that structure could prove distracting to the research councils and could ultimately have a negative impact on the UK's research capability. The Royal Society of Edinburgh has said:

“The RSE welcomes the statement that the individual research councils continue to hold their own budgets and provide the leadership for their own disciplines in an autonomous fashion.”

The creation of UK Research and Innovation in the context of a science and research budget will potentially give greater co-ordination across the research councils and we hope that it will offer a stronger voice to the research community in its interaction with the Government. Scotland currently performs well in attracting funding from research councils for grants, studentships and fellowships, with the latest recorded figures showing that Scotland attracted 13% of the UK total in 2012-13. However, research council spending on infrastructure in Scotland in that period amounted to only 5% of UK spending. Similarly, only 7% of Innovate UK funding is spent in Scotland.

We are concerned that the establishment of the UKRI could lead to a lack of consideration among the research councils and Innovate UK's decision-making bodies of Government priorities and research needs in Scotland and the other devolved nations. Scotland's research interests and priorities will be better served if the new UKRI board has experience and understanding of the research and innovation landscape and policy across Scotland—as well as the rest of the UK. We therefore ask that the devolved Administrations have representation on the board.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend—despite what the annunciator was saying, she is not the hon. Member for Angus—and I visited the University of Glasgow, which is in my constituency and close to hers, to meet the staff of the space research department. They spoke to us at some length about the importance of research mechanisms and the ability of research councils to join funding all the way up. Does she agree that it is important when given the opportunity in a Bill such as this to try to make some progress on those issues?

Carol Monaghan: Absolutely. One of the problems found by institutions such as the University of Glasgow is that there is a black hole between different areas of research, so let us hope that the proposals lead to greater collaboration.

[Carol Monaghan]

Collaboration between research councils and Innovate UK is positive, but Innovate UK's core mission is different and distinct from that of the research councils. Its bridging role between business and the research community is about stimulating and supporting business innovation, and that mission could be threatened if Innovate UK does not work collaboratively with the academic research community. SMEs currently account for 90% of Scotland's business base, and we hope that Innovate UK will continue to work with them in its distinct role.

Finally, the impact of the EU referendum has serious implications for the university sector and, given that Scotland clearly voted to remain in the EU, the UK Government must work with the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish higher education institutes are not adversely affected. In 2014-15, over 13,000 EU students were studying for undergraduate degrees at Scottish universities. At the Science and Technology Committee last week, I asked the Minister for Universities and Science about the status of those students over the next few years, but he was not able to offer a guarantee beyond 2017-18. I call again for an immediate guarantee from the UK Government that all EU students studying in Scotland, and across the rest of the UK, will be able to continue their studies without disruption.

Patrick Grady: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way a second time. After the EU referendum, the University of Glasgow and many other Scottish universities were quick to state how welcome EU students were in their institutions. They went as far as they possibly could to assure students that they would continue welcome them and that they wanted students to complete their courses and remain valuable parts of their institutions. Does my hon. Friend welcome how quickly those institutions responded to the result? Will she press the Government for further reassurance?

Carol Monaghan: I agree 100%. The University of Aberdeen also took the bold step of saying that there would be no change in the status of any EU student—not just those currently studying, but future students looking to attend the university, a point which the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) might like to note.

The Bill does not reflect the impact of Brexit. Scottish institutions have not been offered any assurances that the €217 million of current EU funding will be made up by the UK Government. With the current instability in higher education, this is the wrong time to press ahead with Bill, so the SNP is not able to support it in its current form.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. To help all Members, instead of setting a time limit, if we could do up to 12 minutes, we will all get equal time and we should all be happy.

3.39 pm

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I will try to keep this even shorter, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is a great pleasure, as a London MP, to be here with

the dynamic duo who have now taken over our education system: my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), who is, unfortunately, not in her place, and my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson). Having sat here for the past two hours, I can confirm that he has slightly blonder hair than she does, although I will allow excuses to be made about that. We have another London Member here, the birthday boy, no less: the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy). Mysteriously, when I read *The Guardian* today I saw that it said he was born in 1972 and I was sure that must have been a misprint—he does not look a day over 55 to me. I look forward to hearing his words later on.

At this point, I should make a brief declaration of interest, in that I have spent the past 11 years on the advisory board of the London School of Commerce, which is a private higher education provider.

Michael Gove: I am sure the House is delighted to hear that my right hon. Friend is a reader of *The Guardian*, but may I say that I am glad we do not have mandatory reselection in the Conservative party, because such a confession might not endear him to his constituents, and I very much hope he is here for many years to come?

Mark Field: That is very kind. As a vice-chairman of the party, may I say that there might be mandatory reselection in Surrey Heath before too long if we are not careful? I thank my right hon. Friend for the observation. Perhaps this is another *Guardian* misprint; perhaps that is what the problem has been.

As I was saying, before I was rudely interrupted, my role on the advisory board of the London School of Commerce has been enthralling and interesting. I have watched the development of a private education provider that has dabbled with the idea of having full university status and trying to get degree-awarding powers but has actually expanded overseas. This debate is probably not a great opportunity to talk about the Government's immigration-related policies, but let me say that I do recognise that they have had an impact on the broader higher education sector; a school that had some 7,500 students coming from abroad only 10 years ago now has about a third of that number. However, one interesting thing has been that this college provides two-year degrees and charges well under the £9,000 limit, and there has been growth in the number of domestic students in recent years; there is a sense that this is a vocational, value-added degree going forward. I have watched the college develop further colleges overseas in places such as Kuala Lumpur and Dhaka in Bangladesh, and in a number of European centres. The fact that the college is often just regarded as an alternative provider fails to acknowledge its genuine contribution to the vital eco-system of higher education, where this Bill, perhaps belatedly, is doing important work. Elements of this Bill would have come into place some five years ago had it not been for some high-profile problems arising.

It is fair to say that there is an apparent sense of rude health in this sector, and we all have to recognise that this is a hugely important business and revenue generator for UK plc. That is partly because of the benefit of our having the English language, but to a large extent it is because we have highly recognised and highly approved

standards of quality. We perhaps take that for granted with our own education providers, be they in the HE or the FE sphere, but this is not necessarily the case in many other parts of the world. The Minister will know that we have some 125 publicly funded HE institutions, which have almost 2 million students. The sector employs 170,000 academic staff and has an income in excess of £25 billion per year.

The research side of what is being proposed in the Bill is crucial, as innovation is at the heart of what is done in many of our universities, although not all. It is right to recognise that some providers in this sphere will not go down the research route, recognising that they will be focusing largely on vocational education. It is also important that we bear in mind that it is not just spin-off companies from the Cambridge universities of this world that do well; a huge number of high-tech companies, in pharmaceuticals and in other areas, have tremendous successes.

I have been the MP in this district for the past 15 years. Right in the heart of London, we have a tremendous array of HE providers. We have the super Russell Group of the London School of Economics, King's College London, Imperial and, just outside my constituency, University College London. They are globally successful universities, and in many ways the dominance in popular culture of Oxbridge is now being threatened, in a positive way, by the raising of standards by those four London universities, which are now global players in what they do.

I also have in my constituency one of the sites of the London Metropolitan University, which has been a troubled institution. I have worked with a number of MPs across the House to try to make the case for its continued existence in these troubled times. When I hear debates such as the one that took place earlier today on the idea of allowing universities to fail, I think that that is an important part of any economic eco-system. I do not deny that the implications of such a failure for employees and for students cannot be ignored, but I believe that that is a healthy state of affairs if universities are not doing the job and not providing the education that they ought to provide. If that education is not of appropriate quality or there is insufficient demand for it, universities should not be preserved just because they have existed as institutions for a long time.

I welcome the Bill. I shall focus my brief comments on part 1, which deals with the creation of the office for students. No one can deny that the regulatory system in this sector has evolved into a bafflingly complex framework of organisations and an alphabet spaghetti of acronyms. The overlap between the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Office for Fair Access and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education has rightly been identified. The new mechanism will get rid of that overlap.

I wholeheartedly support the recognition of the role of students as consumers. They are far more conscious of that role than they ever were in my time as an undergraduate in the mid-1980s, and that is a positive thing. One of the by-products of students paying for their education is that they want to get good value from it. They will be much more critical of poor or repetitive teaching. They will want to ensure broadly that the facilities, both academic and non-academic, within the institutions to which they are paying that money are of

a high standard. When I see undergraduates in my constituency, I am struck by how focused they are on getting the best out of their education. One might say that that is consumerism; one might say it is a source of regret for those of us who were at university in bygone decades. I think it is a healthy state of affairs that students take such matters seriously. The Bill implicitly recognises that by setting up the office for students.

The Bill needs full scrutiny in Committee and in the other place, where there are plenty of experts in this field. There are concerns about the granting of provisional degrees, which were mentioned earlier by the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden). The proposals to relax the criteria for validating degree-awarding powers will need to be examined thoroughly. I have some sympathy with the view that because the title of a university is much respected, it should be clearly protected and defined. I hope that if we have a system that allows market failures, the Government will make provision for the interests that need to be protected. No university should be seen as too big or too old and established to fail. A range of regulatory relationships will need to be clarified, but the Bill establishes an important new architecture for the higher education system.

One aspect that will no doubt be debated here and in Committee is Government and ministerial interference in university courses. We need to ensure above all that those institutions retain as much academic and administrative freedom as possible. That is important going forward.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Secretary of State on the ambitious proposals set out in the Bill. She has already shown herself willing to put excellence and elitism at the heart of the state school system, with her open-mindedness about the expansion of the grammar school sector. As a committed Conservative and former grammar school boy, it is tremendous for me to hear a Conservative Government putting social mobility at the heart of our educational philosophy.

I regard the promotion of competition, variety and consumer choice as long overdue, so I am delighted that this Secretary of State and her Minister for Universities and Science have indicated the intention to take on the vested interests in this field. There are few things as conservative as the left-leaning cadre of vice-chancellors. I wish the Bill Godspeed and look forward to hearing the rest of the debate on it this afternoon.

3.49 pm

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field). Whatever we disagree about, I very much respect the fact that he has in the past pointed out the damage done to the higher education system by ill-thought-out commitments and policies on immigration. I hear his note of caution about the regulation of new providers. I will say a bit more about that in a minute.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) said in his excellent speech—others have mentioned this—the Bill comes at a time when universities and research institutes are reeling from the Brexit vote. The drafting of the Bill and the associated consultation clearly took place in the context of an expected remain result. The uncertainties about replacing EU research

[Mr Andrew Smith]

funding and the position of EU students now confronting the sector would be good enough reasons, in themselves, for putting this legislation on hold to give this House and the Government the opportunity to ensure that the framework for higher education and research is fit for purpose in a post-Brexit world.

There are other concerns about the Bill. While I do not have a problem, in principle, with facilitating new providers and more choice in the sector, there are strong grounds, as the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster hinted, for proceeding more carefully than the Government propose, because it is likely that limited Government finance will be further stretched when funding per student is already under enormous pressure, and there is a risk that failure by new providers will be bad for students and damage the reputation of UK higher education more widely. Let us remember that UK universities and research are currently a huge national asset—an area of competitive strategic advantage that will be even more important, economically and culturally, as we strive to make a success of life outside the EU.

Further, specific, concerns have been drawn to my attention by Oxford University. Clause 23, which provides for the assessment of standards as well as quality, is an extension of regulatory power that infringes institutional autonomy. The Government need to tell us what its purpose is and how it will be used. Clause 43 empowers the office for students to revoke by Order the Acts of Parliament or royal charters that have established our universities. The ability to dismantle so much with so little by way of parliamentary scrutiny cannot be right, and much stronger scrutiny and protection is needed.

Liam Byrne: Is it not incumbent on the Minister to give a categorical assurance to the House that where rights and entitlements proscribed in royal charter are deleted, they will be reinstated by the Government?

Mr Smith: Yes, indeed. As I have said, there must be full scrutiny by this House. These are Acts of Parliament that are being overturned by an Order—it is absolutely extraordinary.

There are further worries on the structure of research funding. It took the Secretary of State an awfully long time to get on to research. While the Government's stated intention is to keep the dual funding principle, all research funding is to be the responsibility of the proposed UK research and innovation body, and there is no explicit provision for ring-fenced funding for anything other than specific pieces of work. It is therefore not clear in practice how dual funding is to be delivered. The call in the Bill for a “balanced funding principle” to which the Secretary of State must have regard is vague. I put it to the Government that it is crucial to future UK research capacity that the Bill strengthen the commitment to dual support.

I am also concerned that the Bill does not mention the higher education innovation fund. The Bill artificially divides teaching and research, when in practice the two often go together, especially at the highest levels, including in the work of museums and the well-founded laboratory principle. There really needs to be proper recognition of that in the Bill.

Similarly, there is a huge omission in there not being any requirement for UK Research and Innovation to provide for postgraduate research education and training, which is crucial for graduates moving into the high-tech sector. That was previously regarded, and rightly so, as being so important that the research councils had it written into their royal charters, so why is it not in this Bill? It certainly should be.

I am also alarmed that under clause 84, research councils could be abolished or merged by order. That could affect whole areas of research, so surely it is sufficiently serious that Parliament should have proper oversight.

There is much that is wrong with this Bill, and it is spectacularly ill timed. The Government should take it away, consult and think again.

3.56 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I welcome the Bill, particularly its focus on enabling students to make an informed choice about their university options. I have been concerned for some time that too many students regard an immediate, traditional campus-based undergraduate degree as their only option. In saying that, in no way do I wish to diminish the importance of such degrees. For many, that is absolutely the right option and there should be no restriction on numbers—if it is right for somebody, they should do it—but it should be a positive choice and not regarded as a default option.

I want students at school to be able to look at all the options open to them and choose what works best for them, whether that is a traditional degree, a degree apprenticeship, a part-time degree or even deferring their degree to a later point in their career. I welcome the proposals to establish new, high-quality providers to offer different products and increase the range of options for students.

We must also not forget to place the Bill's provisions in the context of upskilling the workforce and lifelong learning. I am very proud to have in my constituency the Open University. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden), was a lecturer there for some time. In its nearly 50 years of existence—I am not saying that the hon. Gentleman was there from the outset—it has given opportunities to some 2 million people to upskill and reskill.

The excellent briefing note distributed by the Open University encapsulates the point that I want to make:

“It is essential that these far-reaching proposals are not developed solely through the policy lens of an 18 year old student entering higher education for the first time. Re-skilling and upskilling the adult workforce are essential for future prosperity. Economic success in the coming years depends on embedding a lifelong learning culture which rest on 3 co-equal pillars: flexible lifetime learning opportunities, apprenticeships and full time study.”

I very much agree with that.

I welcome the measures that the Government have already taken to assist part-time students, including the decision to introduce maintenance loans in 2018-19, which will work alongside the tuition fee loans introduced in 2012-13. They have also changed the equal and lower qualification restriction that was imposed in 2008. That will allow new students to apply for tuition fee loans for

a second, part-time honours degree in engineering, technology and computer sciences this year, and for a wider range of part-time honours degrees in science, technology, engineering and maths in 2017-18. That will be very much welcomed by the Open University.

To reinforce the support for the part-time higher education sector, I want two suggestions to be considered in Committee. The first is an express commitment to part-time higher education and adult education in the proposed general duties of the office for students; and the second is confirmation that a broad range of different types of English higher education providers will be recognised in the make-up of the office for students board. I hope that those constructive amendments, which the Open University has suggested, will be considered favourably in Committee.

While I am on the topic of the OU, I have two other small asks from it that I would like to put on record. The first is a simple request for clarification. The Open University is the only UK-wide university that has a footprint in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as in England. Clause 75 defines the meaning of English higher education provider, and I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm that that definition will apply to the Open University as well as to other English-based universities. The second ask relates to the Open University's status as a centre of research excellence. The Open University wishes to ensure that the new UKRI body, which is set out in the Bill, will not concentrate research into fewer institutions and geographical locations; and that early career researchers, women and minority groups will be offered opportunities and routes to support their research ambitions.

I turn to the opportunities for creating new high-quality higher education institutions. There is huge potential for new entrants into the market, and I agree with the comments of the principal of Pearson College, Roxanne Stockwell, who said:

"It is clear that the dominance of the one-size-fits-all model of university education is over... Students are calling out for pioneering institutions offering alternative education models and an increased focus on skills that will prepare them for the careers of the future".

I will use Milton Keynes, which I represent, to illustrate that potential. Members may not be aware of this, but in January next year Milton Keynes turns 50. It has reached its planned size, in terms of both population and physical footprint. I apologise to the right hon. Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith), who heard me make these comments in Westminster Hall last week, but they merit a wider audience.

Mr Andrew Smith: The hon. Gentleman need not worry; his comments bear repetition.

Iain Stewart: I am grateful for that endorsement. Having reached its planned size, Milton Keynes is actively debating what comes next. There is a live debate about our future size and shape—what the Milton Keynes of 2050 should look like—and our place in the important Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor, which the former Chancellor announced in the Budget that the National Infrastructure Commission would explore for growth potential.

Milton Keynes has the Open University, as I have mentioned. Nearby, we have excellent universities such as Cranfield and Buckingham, and we have a healthy

further education and higher education partnership in University Centre Milton Keynes. Despite those things, it has long been an aspiration for Milton Keynes to have a campus-based university of its own to help to generate economic growth and provide all the other social and cultural benefits that university towns and cities enjoy, but I question whether the answer is a traditional campus-based university. Given the increasing consumer sophistication of students, should we not try to create something new that benefits the innovative tradition of Milton Keynes?

In that context, I was absolutely delighted that the recently established Milton Keynes Futures 2050 commission—chaired by Sir Peter Gregson, the vice chancellor of Cranfield—proposed as one of its central recommendations a Milton Keynes institute of technology, or MKIT. Its mission would be to promote research, teaching and practice that provide solutions to the challenges faced by fast-growing cities. It would offer portfolio learning, living lab research and partnerships with a wide range of global educational institutions and employers. MKIT could be the institution that fills the growing skills gap that we face in the new intelligent mobility market. We urgently need to train more people in skills in this sector.

I am also proud to have the Transport Systems Catapult in Milton Keynes. Working with Departments, it has published research showing that there will be a gap of hundreds of thousands of people with those skills in a market that will be worth £900 billion by 2025. If we want to have a share of that global market, we really need to focus skills in this area. That is just one example of the many opportunities that exist, and the Bill provides huge opportunities for innovation.

There is a critical link between the expansion of higher education and the prospects for local economies and people's life challenges. I strongly believe that the Bill strengthens that link, and I very much look forward to supporting it tonight.

4.5 pm

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): I want to pick up where my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) left off. The truth is that much in the Bill is long overdue. Much of the proposed legislation is necessary, but the truth is that the Bill was written for a very different time and in a very different era. The risk is that the Minister is presenting to the House a halfway house that will leave us with the task of having to come back to some big strategic questions to finish the job.

The Secretary of State was absolutely right to underline the necessity of the Bill. We need the strength of our higher education institutions today like never before. In this post-referendum era, we will have to get a lot better at making things a lot more efficiently. The level of productivity growth that blights our economy today is actually worse than it was at the end of the 1970s, when we used to call it the British disease. The problem with the Bill, however, is that it does nothing to address the big strategic challenges that confront students, our science base and our skills system. I will touch quickly on each.

First, let me talk about students. We all know that there is still a big debate to be had about the financial viability of the student loan system. This afternoon is

[Liam Byrne]

not the occasion to rehearse the fragility of the Ponzi scheme that now underpins that system, but I often used to debate with the Minister's predecessors whether Britain could look forward to a debt write-off of £70 billion or £80 billion. The basic message was pretty simple: the student loan system as currently set up is not fit for purpose, and it is certainly not fit for the future.

The Minister has proposed a number of measures to ensure a degree of transparency, not least freezing the thresholds for student loan repayments, but the truth is that we need a wholesale overhaul of the transparency of the system. We need the system to work well, but, quite frankly, too often we are looking through a glass darkly when we try to figure out what is going on.

Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I am disappointed that there is not enough in the Bill about lifelong learning, and I am very disappointed that there is nothing in it about workplace learning. I would like a bold revolution in the way we bring together Unionlearn, the Workers Education Association and the Open University, so that it is possible for workers to go from ABC to PhD in their workplace. In a world where someone can get a massive open online learning course beamed to their smartphone, that is surely possible, but we do not have the qualifications system we need to make that a reality, nor is policy in the right place.

The second big challenge we confront is on the science base. Quite frankly, although we are all grateful to Sir Paul Nurse for the heroic job he has done in overhauling the governance of the science base, there is nothing in the Bill to confront the big strategic challenge for science in this country, which is the fact that we are plummeting down the league tables when it comes to science spending. A few years ago, the Royal Society put it rather well, when it said that

“unless we grow smarter, we will grow poorer”.

If the global race is anything, it is a science race, and today we are falling behind. By 2019, China will become the world's biggest science player. Right now, we are already losing the race for the good high-tech jobs of the future. We will not fix such a strategic challenge if we are languishing at 23rd out of 33 OECD countries. Our big competitors around the world—Japan, Korea and countries in Scandinavia—are now spending 3% of GDP on science each and every year, while we spend something like 1.3% of GDP on science. In fact, we would need to crowd in funding and add public spending totalling £23 billion if we were to bring science spending in this country up to the level of our strongest competitors. It is not even clear to me whether we have a 10-year framework for science funding any more. I certainly see nothing in the Bill about how we will strengthen a position that is becoming extremely serious. At a time when so many of our universities are having huge holes punched in their science base and science funding because of the decision to come out of Europe, we needed an awful lot more from the Secretary of State this afternoon about how we will tackle the looming crisis.

The third challenge that I want to touch on briefly is the one that troubles me most: why is there nothing in the Bill to address the revolution that is needed in the technical education system in this country? We know how to design good dual-track technical education systems. How do we know that? Because we did it for Germany

after the second world war. We just forgot to do it for ourselves. The noble Lord Percy reported to this House in 1944 that

“the position of Great Britain as a leading industrial nation is being endangered by a failure to secure the fullest possible application of science to industry...and...this failure is partly due to deficiencies in education.”

The problem is that what was true in 1944 is true today. We do not have a strong dual-track system that takes a student in a constituency like mine and leads them on to the very highest level of technical education. We have a rise in unqualified science teachers in our classrooms; a careers service that the CBI says is on “life support”; a further education system that was cut by 40% over the course of the last Parliament; and an apprenticeship system that is growing the number of level 2s, but delivering the grand total of just 100 apprentices on level 5 in my home city of Birmingham. Today, just 2% of apprentices go on to level 5 study, and there has been a 40% fall in the numbers on HNCs, HNDs and foundation degrees. Those who are seeking a professional and technical path to higher education from the age of 14 up to the age of 21 go through a system that is overseen by Ofqual, Ofsted, the AQA, the Education Funding Agency, the Skills Funding Agency and now the office for students. It is, quite frankly, a dog's breakfast.

We need a holistic review to put in place a single, comprehensive dual-track system for technical education. That means everyone from the age of 14 learning some kind of technical education; it means rebuilding the careers service; it means high-quality, gold-standard apprenticeships with everyone studying English and maths up to the age of 18; it means a new degree of specialisation in our colleges, with the creation of institutes of technical excellence; and it means an apprenticeship system that gives at least half of our young people the chance to take a technical apprenticeship up to level 5. We know how to run those apprenticeship schemes because great British companies such as Jaguar Land Rover and BAE Systems are doing so. The only problem is that they are harder to get into today than Oxford University.

Crucially, we need a new partnership between further education and higher education. We should be emulating the best practice in the United States, where it is possible to do the first couple of years of a degree at a further education college before moving on to finish it in a couple of years at a world-class higher education institution. That is why the duty to collaborate is so vital, and why it is such a problem that it is missing from the Bill.

We have been burying our scientists with our sovereigns since the death of Sir Isaac Newton. There is no other country on earth that would get BAFTAs for films about its great scientists. We are one of the world's great science powers, but our position is in jeopardy. That is why we needed more than a halfway house from the Secretary of State this afternoon; we needed a Bill that repositioned higher education as the powerhouse it needs to be for our country's future.

4.13 pm

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I welcome the Secretary of State to her role. I am also

very pleased that the Minister is taking the Bill through the House, as he spent many months working on the Green Paper and, more recently, the White Paper.

I welcome the news that further and higher education will be pulled in to the Department for Education. I note the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) about the Education Committee's workload increasing significantly, but perhaps my workload will reduce somewhat because the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy might be somewhat short-lived.

We have an outstanding higher education system. We have world-leading universities—we are home to four of the world's top 10 universities—and are second only to the US. However, we must not be complacent, which is why I welcome the Bill. The research excellence framework is a well established and recognised way of assessing and incentivising high quality research. However, the higher education sector has been too heavily geared to prioritising academic research. The Bill looks to achieve a much better balance, emphasising those things that matter to students, their parents and employers.

We need to ensure that students get value for money. We need to ensure that, at the end of their degree, they feel that they have gained from their university experience and, critically, that they can progress on to graduate jobs or further study. We need to ensure that we do not hear students saying, "Was university really worth it?"

To take a few facts, worryingly, the HEIFESS—higher education in further education students survey—showed that more than a third of students said that they would have made a different decision if they had known then what they know now. Similarly a Higher Education Statistics Agency survey showed that around 20% of employed graduates are in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating.

Students need better information about universities and the courses they are looking at, and support to get into graduate roles. I therefore welcome the creation of the office for students, as set out in part 1 of the Bill, which will be the main regulatory body for higher education in England. The duties of the office for students will be to promote quality, greater choice and opportunities for students. Specifically, it will operate the teaching excellence framework, which we have heard a lot about this afternoon. There should be no surprise about the TEF because it was a key Conservative manifesto commitment.

The TEF will put in place incentives designed to drive up the standard of teaching in all universities and provide students with greater clarity about where teaching is best and about the benefits they can expect to gain from their course. In turn, that will create more competition within the sector and continue to drive up the standard of teaching. It will focus on helping students progress into employment or further study.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, of which I am a member, along with the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield), who is in his place, conducted an inquiry into the new TEF. As a Committee, we welcomed and endorsed the Government's focus on teaching quality, agreeing that a stronger incentive to focus on teaching quality via the TEF will help to ensure that higher education institutions meet student expectations and improve on their leading international position.

Although the rationale for the TEF was generally accepted by the sector, questions and concerns were raised about the potential metrics, how it will affect institutions and how it will apply. Specifically, concerns were raised about the link between the proposed metrics—employability, retention and satisfaction—and teaching quality, and the potential unintended consequences of institutions seeking to optimise their scores on each metric.

Learning gain was suggested as an alternative—other countries are exploring it—but work needs to be done to establish an effective way to measure it. I understand that the Higher Education Funding Council for England is undertaking pilot studies on learning gain or added value metrics that might work, but they could take two or three years to develop. The Committee therefore called on all parties to prioritise the speedy establishment of viable metrics relating to learn and gain.

The technical consultation was therefore welcome and an opportunity for the sector to engage further with the development of the TEF, including ways in which it believed graduate employment could be measured. The development of additional metrics is key to ensuring that it can be incorporated in the TEF by year three, 2018-19, as set out in the White Paper published in May. As I understand it, the technical consultation closed in July. Will the Minister, when he comes to wind up, update the House on progress in developing additional metrics: those being considered and pilots currently being undertaken? The need to pilot the TEF, the metrics and the development of additional measures means it was welcome news in the White Paper that the speed at which the TEF would be implemented, specifically the link with fees, would be slowed down.

Turning to the link between the TEF and fees, we need to ensure that the higher education sector is on a financially sustainable footing. With record numbers of students securing a place at university, we have seen that tuition fees did not stop young people accessing university. With the student loan system, we have a mechanism by which students do not need to meet the costs of university up front. Labour created a provision in law to maintain tuition fees in line with inflation in the Higher Education Act 2004. Between 2007 and 2010, Labour raised tuition fees in line with inflation every year. The tuition cap of £9,000, set in 2012, is now worth only £8,500 in real terms and is expected to erode further, potentially to £8,000 by the end of the Parliament.

To date, there has been no accountability when it comes to institutions increasing their fees in line with inflation. With the real value of tuition fees declining and concerns in the sector about maintaining levels of investment, we need to find ways to provide universities with the scope to increase their fees in a way that is fair and accountable. The TEF has a role to play, although all parties need to work together on design and the metrics to make it work in practice. As I have said, I am pleased that the White Paper confirmed that 2017-18 will be used as a trial year. I am sure the higher education sector will have welcomed the opportunity to input further into the technical consultation.

I was pleased to read an article by Steve Smith, vice-chancellor of the University of Exeter, in the *Times Higher Education*. Despite concerns about some of the detail, he stated:

[Amanda Milling]

“But in my view, it is essential that we proceed with the teaching excellence framework (TEF) linked to tuition fee increases, a policy that offers significant benefits for the quality of higher education that are important to both students and universities. This is why Universities UK board unanimously supported the link between an effective TEF and fee rises.”

He went on to say:

“The government rightly wants ‘something for something’, for the economy and for students. For the economy, the TEF offers a way to support the continued improvement in the contribution of higher education to the knowledge economy through the creation of graduates with the skills needed by industry and business. For students, the ‘something’ is a funding mechanism that allows institutions to invest in teaching and the student experience and thereby to preserve and enhance the quality of education in our universities.”

Finally, I want to turn to the idea of new universities entering the market. Our economy needs more graduates. Over half of the job vacancies between now and 2022 are expected to be in occupations that employ graduates. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned in her speech, lifting the cap on student numbers means more university places being made available.

Mr Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): Has my hon. Friend made any study of the outrageous discrimination suffered by English students studying at Scottish universities after we come out of the European Union?

Amanda Milling: My right hon. Friend makes an interesting point, on which I am sure there will be further discussions.

It is excellent news that record numbers of students are securing a university place. What is more, the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds going into higher education is up too. UCAS data show that young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are applying at a record rate in the 2016-17 academic year. This is excellent progress. But with more demand for graduates and more skills required in the workplace, the sector cannot stand still, which is why I welcome the provisions in part 1 of the Bill making it easier for new high-quality universities to enter the market. This will mean that more places can be created and that students will have more choice, as well as encouraging greater diversity and innovation in the sector.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend therefore welcome the news that Chinese investors propose to take over the Staffordshire University campus in Stafford, vacated by Staffordshire University, to provide precisely that additional choice and—I am sure—excellence?

Amanda Milling: I thank my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour for his point. He is absolutely right. In fact, he must have been reading over my shoulder, because I was just about to talk about Staffordshire University. I currently do not have a university in Cannock Chase, but we have businesses and organisations with close links to Staffordshire University, and I have a lot of constituents who go there. As a consequence of the Bill and opening up the market to new entrants, perhaps one day I will have a new university in my constituency.

In conclusion, we have a world-class higher education sector, but we cannot be complacent. Our economy needs high-quality graduates and our graduates need

the skills to contribute to our economy. I welcome the Bill. It demonstrates that the Government have a clear plan for higher education and builds on the progress already made.

4.26 pm

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): The Bill comes before us at a time of great change, the most important of those changes being my birthday today. It was not that long ago that I was sitting in the Minister’s place. In those days, I looked more like Denzel Washington; today, I look like Forest Whitaker.

Last week’s reshuffle saw the universities brief move to the Department for Education and a new Education Secretary appointed together with a new Business Secretary. I served as universities and skills Minister in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and then in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, when universities switched from Education to Business. It became clear to me that this move gave higher education and the sector as a whole a much more prominent voice in Government. Placing universities under the umbrella of Business, Innovation and Skills drew a clear and explicit link between higher education and productivity, social mobility and ensuring that we have the skilled workforce needed to power our economy. Universities, the research they undertake and the education they provide were seen by No. 10, the Treasury and Cabinet Ministers from across Government as absolutely central to what the Government were trying to achieve.

It is inevitable that the move will mean reduced influence in Whitehall. When DIUS and then BIS were created, there was much debate and some concern among vice-chancellors, but the near universal view was that it would be beneficial. I am concerned, therefore, about this change. It has not been commented on so far but it is the backdrop to the Bill. I ask the Minister: what will happen if our universities are no longer seen as integral to driving innovation and boosting productivity? What will happen when the spending review comes around and universities fight with schools for resources, as they historically did, and lose out, as they historically did?

What will happen when there is pressure to further tighten visa rules for students in order to meet migration targets? BIS worked hard to beat off the Home Office. I was one of those Ministers. The Minister will not admit it, but it is a regular part of the job. My God, how much harder it will be with universities placed in the Department for Education! In each case, the voice of universities will, frankly, carry less weight as a consequence.

Mr Swire: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) said, citing Sir Steve Smith, the vice-chancellor of Exeter University. He will also be aware of the huge number of overseas students at Exeter University, which make it one of the leading universities in the country, if not in the world. I know that the Minister shares my view about visas, but does he not recognise that in this period of uncertainty—not just because of Brexit, but because of visa restrictions—many universities are living in a state of fear? They are worried about European funding for various projects, as well as uncertainty about the visa regime.

Mr Lammy: That was, in a sense, the point I was making. Some of the tensions in Whitehall, particularly those emanating from the Home Office vis-à-vis whoever is at university and where they are placed, lie behind this problem.

There is, however, another problem that has been mentioned by Members, not least by my right hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) and for Oxford East (Mr Smith)—namely that the vote to leave the European Union has made the future very uncertain indeed for higher education institutions. In looking at this Bill, surely the Government must acknowledge the need to provide greater certainty and not further instability at this time. The higher education sector will be particularly adversely affected by the UK's decision to leave the European Union. Brexit will significantly diminish research funding across our universities unless the Government propose a large-scale programme for research funding across all disciplines to fill the gap. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister about that.

We know, of course, that the leave campaign's claim to be saving £350 million a week was entirely fictitious, but I note that the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) promised that any lost EU subsidies paid to farmers would be replaced by central Government funding, so I am sure the House would welcome a similar promise today that any lost research funding will be replaced. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that.

Universities face the prospect of losing out across the board, so how will they fare in this post-Brexit world when the calls to curb immigration inevitably come? Universities have been warning for years that making student visas harder to come by was having a hugely damaging effect, as indeed the right hon. Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) just said. Sir Keith Burnett, vice-chancellor of the University of Sheffield, estimates that 40% of his university's income from teaching comes from international students, and non-UK students also generate £11 billion for the wider UK economy. Almost 100,000 students had their visas cut short between 2013 and 2015, and between 2010 and 2015 the number of overseas students arriving in the UK fell by 25%.

The issue is not just about money, however. What message does Brexit send out? The world-leading reputation of our higher education sector is contingent on a perception of the UK as a globally engaged country; it is this reputation that attracts so much investment, drives so many partnerships across the globe and helps to cement our universities' place at the top of the tree internationally—and it is this reputation that is at risk. Surely in this context, the Government must take a step back, take stock of how Brexit will impact on our universities and then come back to the House with a revised Bill when that impact becomes clearer. I say that as strongly as I can. I know the Minister has worked hard on this Bill—he is a hard-working Minister generally, as we are all aware—but the biggest coach and horses running through the Bill is, frankly, Brexit. It would be good to hear something from him about that.

I am proud of the work that the last Labour Government did in higher education. In 2010, over 50% of additional university places went to students from poorer neighbourhoods for the first time. Our higher education system expanded and together with increased funding

for state schools and the introduction of the education maintenance allowance, more students from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to go to university than ever before in our history. In 2010, too, 2 million people were studying at university—a record number and 400,000 more than in 1997. I know that that was a record achievement, because officials who are sitting in the Box now wrote some of those statistics for me at that time.

At this time of flux, it is crucial that we do not take a step backwards when it comes to improving access to our universities. Earlier this year, the last Prime Minister announced plans to force universities to disclose applicant data so that we could see how they were doing in that regard. The Government aim to double the proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds who enter our universities, and also to increase the number of students from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds by 20%.

At this time of flux, the House will need assurances that that agenda will be taken very seriously and will be driven from the centre, especially given that, in March, the Social Market Foundation's report "Widening Participation" warned that both those targets would be missed on current trends. Les Ebdon, the director of Fair Access to Higher Education, has given the same warning, pointing out that only 21% of universities have met, or are on course to meet, all their access targets.

The figures are striking. Between 2005 and 2015, the proportion of the intake of Russell Group universities who were from poor backgrounds rose from 19.5% to just 20.8%. That is 1% in a decade, and it is not even close to being acceptable. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency, the percentage of deprived pupils admitted by seven of the 24 Russell Group universities—including Oxford, Cambridge and Durham—has fallen in the last decade. According to the Sutton Trust, only 4% of students at our top 10 universities are from the most disadvantaged areas, an increase of 0.6% compared to 2009. Just 3.6% of Cambridge students and 2.4% of Oxford students are from the 20% of areas with the lowest higher education participation levels,

I know that the new Prime Minister is making her mark by ensuring there is not over-representation of people from independent schools on the Front Bench, but I think I should put on record why that is so important. Independent school pupils are nearly three times more likely to be accepted by the 30 most highly selective universities than comprehensive school students: the acceptance rates are 48.2% and 18% respectively. State pupils in Hammersmith and Fulham are 10 times more likely to be accepted by highly selective universities and 50 times more likely to be accepted by Oxbridge than pupils in Hackney. Four schools and one college send more students to Oxbridge each year than the bottom 2,000 schools and colleges put together.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the removal of caps on university places brought about a dramatic transformation, enabling people from disadvantaged and, indeed, all backgrounds to apply to universities and to gain places? If the number of places is limited, that limits life chances from the start.

Mr Lammy: I do not accept that, I am afraid. The removal of the cap does not help when it comes to fair access. All that it does is help more chinless wonders from more public schools to get in.

Given that 100 elite schools account for 3% of the total of 31.9% of admissions to Oxbridge, the same proportion as in 2008, we have seen absolutely no progress in the opening up of Oxbridge entrance. St Pauls Girls' School and Westminster lead the way—nearly half their students go to Oxbridge—while more than 1,300 schools do not have a single Oxbridge entrant, and only 50 students receiving free school meals were admitted to Oxbridge in 2013.

I acknowledge that progress has been made in widening access to universities for our most disadvantaged students and that more poor children are going to university, but the crucial question is: which university? I know that the Secretary of State is new, but she did not really get to the heart of that. It is not just about the widening of participation, but about fair access so that people can get their straight As and A*s and they too can make their way from Sunderland, from Darlington and from Tottenham to these universities.

Rebecca Pow: The right hon. Gentleman is making an extremely valuable case but does this not highlight why we need this Bill and some of the things in it, in particular the focus on transparency, so that we can look at social mobility in the individual institutions and work out where they are going wrong and where they need to do more? That is precisely what this Bill is for.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I might be able to help a little, as the hon. Lady is hoping to catch my eye next. Mr Lammy, your speech has taken about 14 minutes so far, and I did advise Members to take about 12 minutes. I am sure your contribution will be coming to an end very shortly.

Mr Lammy: Transparency will of course help, but we know what works and under the Labour Government most of that was covered by the Aimhigher programme which, sadly, was abolished by this Government.

Do we want our universities to be engines of social mobility or do we accept that the universities will merely reinforce and embed the inequality of opportunity that pervades our society? That is the central question and that is the test against which this Bill should be held. Of course, we welcome some of the changes that will establish a new improved body for what was the Office for Fair Access, but the points made so far in this debate about teaching are particularly well made. To link teaching to the labour market when universities' purview is not entirely about the labour market is worrying, and to preference funding alongside that teaching is, I think, suspect. I certainly want to hear the Minister say more about that and I hope that issue receives more scrutiny in Committee.

The question is: is this Bill the right one now given the Brexit challenge? Is it really going to make a change beyond that on transparency about fair access? I hope the Minister will come back to that point. And is it right, on the teaching question alone, to put all the burdens on universities in relation to the labour market, and certainly to allow them to charge more for teaching when that ought to be at the heart of what a university does anyway?

4.42 pm

Rebecca Pow: I am very pleased to see the Minister for Universities and Science, my hon. Friend Member for Orpington (Joseph Johnson) back on the Front Bench, and I want to put on record that I welcome the Secretary of State to her position. I share her experience of being the first person in my family to go to university. Both my parents left school at 16 and came from a lowly farming background and I can honestly say it is, and was, a ticket to the world. In those days, very few women went to university, so I can assure the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) that things have definitely improved.

I rise to support this Higher Education and Research Bill with that as my background, and also with having two children who have already gone through university and one son who, in fairness, is deciding whether to go at all and is thinking about what it will provide. I realise how important it is to go to university, to consider which subject to study and what job might be available at the end of it. Those things are very important.

I have discussed this with many students in my constituency, both at the local sixth-form college, Richard Huish, which is exceedingly good and is in the top 10 in the country, and at Somerset college. I talk to young people about what is preventing them from going further, why they do not want to go—whether they would rather stay at home and so forth. I am very hopeful that lots of these things will be addressed in the Bill because higher education is undoubtedly good for the individual.

Graduates on average earn in excess of £100,000 more over their lifetime, having got that graduate premium. It is not just good for the individual, it is also good for the economy, and in this very rapidly changing world it is essential that here in the UK, especially in our post-Brexit era, we can move our workforce forward. That is why this Bill is going to be so important.

Around 20% of UK economic growth between 1982 and 2005 was a result of increased numbers of graduates, and the skills they brought to the table. I therefore welcome the Bill, and one of its key aims is to encourage and enable even more people to have such opportunities. The Government have been attacked by the Opposition, but the record is already much improved from the days of Labour, with the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds who go into higher education up from around 13% in 2009 to almost 19% now. The situation is improving, and young people from the most disadvantaged areas of England are now 36% more likely to enter higher education than they were in 2009. That is a record of gradual improvement, but more needs to be done, and the Bill will address that.

The Bill will support the establishment of new universities and promote choice and competition, making it easier for high quality, new providers and challenger institutions to enter the sector and award degrees, giving students more choice and boosting competition to improve teaching quality. Why is that necessary? We have heard lots of points this afternoon, but basically we need to address and improve the skills gap, and ensure a flow of young people and mature students who go on to further education and into business. We must ensure the right courses for those people.

I have spoken to many businesses in my constituency and held roundtable meetings, and it is clear that the right young people are not coming through to work in

those businesses. Taunton Fabrications makes bridges, stairwells and stairways for railways all over the country, but it cannot find the right people to work in its business and it is keen for us to get some better courses going. Fox Brothers, which has recently been taken over by Deborah Meaden, is a high-quality, high-end weaving company that provides Yves Saint Laurent and other top-end French companies with fabrics. It cannot find the right calibre of people with engineering experience, or the right textile experience to work in that company, and the Bill will help with that.

If we can address those gaps, we will help productivity in Taunton Deane and the wider south-west. For new universities, however, we are in a cold spot—not weatherwise today—because we do not have a university in the area. Much research has been done to prove that we could do with one, and planning is in progress. Nearby Bridgwater College has just joined with Somerset College, and that is where we hope to have a university. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) spoke about thinking outside the box and focusing new universities on the specialisms, strengths, and skills needed—particularly those already in the area—and that is exactly what we are doing in Taunton Deane.

The idea is to link up with health and nursing education—I know my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) is present, but Somerset’s main hospital is in Taunton Deane. It already runs courses with the local college, but we must build and focus on them more, and a university would help with that. We also have local specialisms in energy skills, and low-carbon energy and related engineering. That links into Hinkley Point, which we are all very confident we will pull off. That is spawning a plethora of other industries, but we need students and graduates to train in those areas, and to go out in the wider country to use their knowledge. We also have links with the Ministry of Defence which provides training, and with Rolls-Royce in Filton. There are lots of opportunities should we get that university off the ground. I am confident that we will, and that the Bill will help, just as it will in many other places. That would then benefit the wider economy. Productivity in the south-west is below the national level, which is a serious issue. One reason for that is that we do not have the right high-calibre skills and we do not retain our young people. They all go off to university somewhere else, so we need a university right where we are in order to fill the jobs there.

Jo Churchill: Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a tendency for young people to go away to university and then to stay close to where they have been studying? At the moment, that is preventing Taunton Deane from benefiting from its students’ skills.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for making such a good point. Indeed, I feared that, when my own children went up north to get the northern experience from their universities, they might stay there and not come home, lovely as they are. It was a great experience and opportunity for them—one went to Leeds and one went to York—but I wanted them to come home. Not that they have yet—they have gone to various other places.

All these things are tied together. This is not just about upping the education offer; we also need to have the right infrastructure. For example, we have to have my A358 road upgrade and we must have good railway stations. All those things need to build together, and I am really confident that the Government get that. That is what they are doing, and our new Prime Minister really does understand that if we are going to increase our productivity, all those things have to link together.

I now want to move on to the part of the Bill that deals with establishing the office for students. It will be the new regulator for higher education, and it will have a duty to promote competition. I welcome this cultural shift in making it a statutory duty to take account of students’ interests. It is amazing that we have not done that before, given that they are the ones who are affected by all this, and I am delighted to welcome this big shift. I have had discussions with the National Union of Students and I understand that, on the whole, this is a very popular move.

We have heard much about the teaching excellence framework, which I welcome. It will ensure that universities focus on graduate employability. That links exactly to what I have been saying about jobs and skills in Taunton Deane; it all links together. Also, a number of hon. Members and hon. Friends have mentioned the need for an emphasis on the quality of teaching rather than just the quantity. We have only to talk to our own children, and other students, about their experiences at university to discover that, given the amount of money involved, some of the courses are sadly lacking in input hours. It is also sometimes unclear what that input actually means—various people are laughing and trying not to laugh—and what it will deliver in terms of employability. I absolutely welcome that part of the Bill.

The Bill also mentions the student protection plan. The hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) talked about what would happen to students if their provider was unable to deliver their course, and the Bill will deal with that. I really am optimistic that, as a result of this new framework, students will be at the heart of the matter. I have already mentioned transparency, which will be key to enabling the social mobility that we all want to see. We all want everyone to have opportunities. We do not want an “us and them” situation; we want everybody to benefit. That is what this is all about. The ability to look at which colleges and universities are offering which courses, and at who is successful and getting a job, will put the onus on the establishments to be the best that they can. Otherwise, people will not want to go to them. I fully support that part of the Bill.

I really welcome the combining of research and innovation funding into a single strategic body—UK Research and Innovation. Research is an important part of this country’s economy and it is absolutely crucial to have a strategic approach to the way we handle it and the £6 billion currently invested in it. We should never underestimate the value of research in this country. We are world leaders in many areas, especially in environmental research, and we must build on that and offer greater opportunities.

The Bill strikes a truly healthy balance between protecting our universities’ global reputation for quality and encouraging more establishments, offering new and

[Rebecca Pow]

innovative opportunities for so many more people from every single background. The Bill is essential and will benefit not only individuals, but the entire economy.

4.54 pm

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): It is obviously a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), although I would caution her against letting “Game of Thrones” influence her understanding of the wonders of the north.

Aristotle once argued:

“The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet.”

Unfortunately, the Bill leaves a sour taste in the mouth, and I want to try to explain why using three particular issues. The first is access and my particular concerns about the provisions regarding sharia-compliant loans. The second is cost and the vexed question of social mobility. The third is about voice and how the Bill will ensure that students are equal partners in shaping the future of the courses that cost them so much to take.

Many colleagues have already set out our grave concerns about the context in which this legislation comes forward, in particular the challenges facing our higher education sector following this country’s decision to vote for Brexit. The sector has already been battered by this Government and now it will be buffeted by Brexit. Whether we voted to remain or to leave, we all recognise the responsibility to ensure planning for what comes next, but it is unclear what Brexit means for our HE sector and just how it will hit funding. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammey), sadly no longer in his place, put it well: how will EU students respond? Will we see a rush of English students to Scottish universities? Will EU students get loans?

Furthermore, what will happen to science funding? While sitting here today, I have sadly missed a session of the Science and Technology Committee. We recently went on a wonderful visit to Manchester to look at the National Graphene Institute. Investment in our higher education institutions through European partnerships is absolutely paramount, so to bring forward legislation at such an uncertain time for our HE sector is a source of real concern for Opposition Members.

Returning to the three issues I want to discuss in the short time available today, I will start with sharia-compliant loans. Do we need specific legislation or can we right this wrong straight away? The 2012 legislation raised real concerns within Britain’s Muslim community because of the introduction of £9,000 fees and the ability to bear interest on student loans. Before then, many families in my community were able to subsidise their children to go to university without a loan, but £9,000 a year fees put that goal beyond the reach of so many. The Bill is supposed to aid social mobility, so it is worth looking at what sharia means. Sharia-compliant loans are about the interest rate, and many Members will know I have a particular concern about what interest rates do to people’s behaviour. Under sharia, money has no intrinsic value—it is a medium of exchange. People who abide by sharia principles on finance believe that it is forbidden to make a profit by exchanging cash. Sharia products respect that principle, enabling Muslims to access finance by sharing the risks and rewards equally based on the principles of Islam.

Like many parts of any religious code, sharia is open to interpretation and challenge, but there is something basically good about being able to respect such issues. I have already talked about it on Twitter today and the response reflected the difficulty that we face in society. I have been called a jihadi for wanting the introduction of sharia-compliant loans, but I suspect that that was by somebody who does not quite understand religion or, indeed, decency.

I have been pushing the Government on this matter for many years because I have seen in my community the impact on many students of our not being able to make such a small change to how a product is delivered. These students have bright young futures and could contribute great talents to our communities and our country but, because we do not respect their religious wishes, they have not been able to go on to higher education. Let me be clear: introducing sharia-compliant loans is not an endorsement of sharia itself. Just as we can challenge the bible’s teachings on homophobia while recognising and learning respect from the Christian community, we do not have to dismiss sharia principles entirely. For me, as a Co-op MP, the questions of mutualism at the heart of sharia finance are particularly apposite. I also recognise the practicalities, as being able to be accommodating in this way could make a big difference to many.

The crucial question for me is: why is this taking so long? I have been petitioning the Government since 2011 about the introduction of sharia-compliant loans. Although it is welcome that the Government have now accepted that it is right to do this, my concern is about whether we need to wait for this legislation, with all the problems that it will bring to the HE sector, to introduce these regulations. The Government already have the power to introduce loans and to change their terms, but tying the fate of these students to waiting for this Bill and refusing to publish a timetable for when this kind of product would be available is holding too many students back. Why this is taking so long raises a question in terms of the Government’s responsibilities under the public sector equality duty. We are asking not for preferential treatment for these students, but for equal treatment. We are asking for equal access and the reasonable amendments it would take to how this product is provided to secure that. I would like the Government and the Minister to clarify why they feel they cannot do this today, so that students who are studying now and wish to go to university—at the very least in 2017—could have confidence that they could do that. The Government sometimes rely on the small print in the student loan terms and conditions, which state:

“The regulations may change from time to time and this means the terms of your loan may also change.”

That is allowing them to change other parts of our student loan system, yet they seem resistant to doing this to help Muslim students access our HE system at all. I ask the Government to set the timetable and give our students that chance.

The second issue I wish to raise is the wider one about cost and the concerns that many of us have about this Bill opening us up to higher costs in higher education. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne), who, sadly, is also not in his place, is right to say that productivity and getting our young people into FE and HE is crucial to addressing

the biggest challenge our country faces. I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham is no longer here, because he was absolutely right in his coruscating remarks about transparency. Transparency means little without action; it is a bit like telling somebody that they are tied to the train tracks and what time the train is coming. If we really want to open up access to university across our society—to be truly committed to social mobility—we have to go much further. The question for me is whether this Bill takes us further or could take us back.

We know that loans and more debt at a time of economic uncertainty are a luxury few in our society can afford. The biggest division in our society today is between those who are able to turn to the bank of mum and dad, and those who are not; university education and the possibility of higher fees is simply a bigger part of that picture of whether we may end up crushing talent, rather than developing it, if we do not act. Nothing in this Bill will change that. Nothing that this Government are doing will change that problem of all 18-year-olds being held back by not having the bank of mum and dad—I refer not just to those who want to go to university, but to those who have fantastic business ideas and those who want to go into FE. A truly socially mobile country would seek to work for 100% of 18-year-olds, not just 50% of them. It would recognise that the debt they might incur might affect not only their choice of whether to go to university, but their ability to get on the housing ladder and the ability for their families to look to the future. I say that as someone who represents too many families who have £10,000 to £15,000-worth of unsecured debt hanging over their heads as it is. If the Bill does not address that issue—indeed, if some of its changes are making it even more likely that these people will incur higher debts—we will lose that talent, to the detriment of us all.

The Bill has to be seen in that context of what this Government are doing truly to open up opportunity. We must hold them to account for their failure to recognise the mistake they made when they got rid of child trust funds; the child ISAs will simply not replace the opportunity that those were providing. Tying university fees to the university rather than to the ability to pay is a retrograde step, in a way that a graduate tax would not be. This is taking place in a country where a rising number of middle-income families are now in rented accommodation because they simply do not have the savings even to begin to get on the housing ladder. We are asking them to take on more debt, and potentially to subsidise more debt for their children, and this will hold too many back.

I say to the hon. Member for Taunton Deane that we need to be clear about these figures on social mobility, because this issue is clearly at the heart of this debate. Yes, there has been a 40% increase, but let us look at what that increase is; we are going from 3,105 students in 2011 to 4,040 students in 2014 from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In the context of our higher education system overall, that is just 3% of disadvantaged children in our country going to those Russell Group universities, compared with 21% of children from the most advantaged backgrounds. Let us have transparency in this debate if we are truly serious about social mobility.

The final point that the Bill has to address, which has not been discussed so far, is student voice. The Bill does not tie up with the provisions of the Consumer Rights Act 2015 that were extended to students, so that students now have consumer rights because they pay tuition fees—a right to a reasonable service at a reasonable time in a reasonable place. Many law students will probably have a field day with those provisions, once they work out that those do apply to the quality of the course provided to them. The Bill does not take account of those provisions or of the value of student voice—the value of students as active consumers, acting to drive up standards.

The National Union of Students has called for student representation on the office for students board. I believe that the Bill must go much further and integrate the rights of students. Indeed, we need a Bill of Rights for students, who are being asked to pay thousands of pounds on the basis that their courses are good enough to get them into a high-paid job afterwards. Those are claims that any trading standards board could look at, but which we have no way of resolving within our current education system.

In conclusion, we know that all legislation coming before the House must pass the stress test of Brexit and what it means—the uncertainties and risks that we must now all tackle, whether we supported the leave or the remain campaign. We know that the Bill falls at that hurdle. We know, too, that it falls on those three powerful metrics—access to further and higher education, the cost of further and higher education, and the voice within further and higher education. I urge the Government to think again, press the pause button and work with the sector and with businesses and the finance sector to make sure that the Bill is not the retrograde step that it may inadvertently become.

Opposition Members are right—there are many potentially good things about the Bill, but there is at present too much that could take us backwards. The talent that lies in all our communities needs and deserves nothing less. Many students are now graduating, but they would look at this Bill and say, “It’s time for a re-sit,” and that is what the Government must offer us today.

5.7 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy).

I welcome the Minister to his continued role in seeing the Bill through. I agree with many of the points that Opposition Members have made about the huge challenge posed by our exit from Europe. Not one of the university vice-chancellors did not support staying in, and many of them have articulated their worries about funding and so on and about students, their safety and stability in choosing a course in this country, and their life beyond 2017. I agree with those points, but the present situation offers us opportunity as well as challenge. If we say that life must go on hold because of the decision taken two weeks ago, we will not get anywhere. Let us look at the opportunity and drive forward from there.

I welcome the Bill. We lead the world in higher education. Our papers are cited more widely than any other country’s in most leading areas of education.

[Jo Churchill]

We may be a small country, yet in the quality and quantity of what our minds produce, we are one of the greatest countries. I had the pleasure last week of seeing another of my daughters graduate. The vice-chancellor said that he had dealings with 183 other countries and the institutions there. Bearing in mind that there are 195 countries across the world, it is clear that our collaboration extends beyond Europe. It is global, and we must seize that opportunity as we move forward.

We have heard the good things about the office for students and the teaching excellence framework, and I will not go over the statistics. We need to ensure quality of delivery and of reputation, because it is only by ensuring the continuing reputation of our universities that we will be able to export and bank what we have to offer in the higher education sector. We also need to ensure that their environment is kept stable, for which we need consistency. That is another reason I do not want to see things put on hold. Planning is vital in what are billion-pound industries, looking at the total combined unit of our universities, further education establishments, upper-tier schools, and businesses. I would like to hear how the Minister will help institutions that look to take the opportunity to export, much like Nottingham University having campuses in Malaysia. How can we work on this and challenge ourselves to think of new and innovative ideas? My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) spoke about the UK equivalent of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology—he called it MKIT—with Cranfield University leading on delivering on different platforms. Such ideas need to be nurtured and propelled under this Bill.

Great teaching must ensure value for money—it should not be the negative that the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said it is. The teaching excellence framework can ensure value for money for students. We talk too much of a homogenous education system. It is the fact that we have variety that gives us choice. That means that institutions can deliver expensive, science-driven degrees alongside some of the less expensive humanities degrees: the mix is important. Some degrees are more expensive than others to administer, and some need a lot of skills. If we give small institutions the right to deliver degrees, now that we have taken away the critical mass of 1,000, we must be careful about the quality of their delivery to ensure that what they are articulating they are delivering is truly what is on the piece of paper. I would like to see certainty in the metrics, as many others have said. It would be a good idea to pilot this in '17, '18 and so on, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) suggested.

Research is exceedingly important. Last week, the vice-chancellor of Lancaster University stated that it would be not only still a European university but an international university. He spoke about how it led on research across the world and was in the top 10 in this country. There is a science race. I have spoken about this in Westminster Hall and the Minister has responded. We do not spend quite enough in that area, and we need to look to punching better than we are. Near to my constituency, we have a huge catalyst of life sciences in Cambridge and at Cambridge University, which draws in £1.6 billion of income—the largest in the country. We need to work on such centres of excellence.

Carol Monaghan: Does the hon. Lady agree that some of the funding for the excellent research that is taking place is coming from the European Union, and we need to be pressing the Government to replace that funding so that that research can continue?

Jo Churchill: I agree that some of it is coming from the European Union. I am not sure whether the Government need to, or will be able to, dip into their pocket to assure that. They must look at possibly more exciting ways of loaning between business and universities, and stimulating particular areas and sectors in order that they contribute to driving the skills base forward. As my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) said, we have many high-powered industries in this country—nuclear, pharmaceuticals, and so on—that are more than adept at this. Indeed, I have spoken to the Minister about our telecoms industry, which is more than adept at putting some of its own money into ensuring that skills come through. While I would agree that there needs to be some certainty, I would not necessarily say that it should come purely from Government.

Innovations in life sciences, pharmaceuticals and the 100,000 Genomes Project show that a strong university sector is key to both the health and the wealth of our nation. Organisations have a large part to play. Businesses want skills, but in order to build them up they must communicate more with the higher and further education sectors. They are playing an increasingly important part in our university institutions.

Last year, one of my daughters graduated across the river, and this week another graduated in Lancaster, which I consider to be truly northern. Another of my daughters is in Newcastle, and another is waiting to go—[*Interruption.*] I could go on for ages. I have a vast amount of experience visiting university campuses across the UK, although not so much those in Scotland. I am constantly amazed by, for example, Heston Blumenthal's interaction with the University of Reading and Tata's interaction with the University of Warwick, which underpin the importance of the relationship between business and universities. Such relationships are already in place and the Bill builds on them, makes them more transparent and develops the connection between further and higher education and business. Our focus on teaching and research allows us to provide opportunities for businesses with specific needs. In his review, Sir Paul Nurse asked for coherence, and I want the Minister to drive that into the Bill.

We have a chance to export education and improve research collaborations. We need to ensure that marketisation is monitored and that there is no oversupply. Although competition is good, oversupply can lead to the problems that have been mentioned. If there is too much freedom in a market, deliverers will always pick the easy route, so there must be an assurance that the low-hanging fruit will not be taken. I have spoken to vice-chancellors this week and our home universities are already looking for students with lower grades to fill the spaces left by EU students who have fallen away. We need to be aware of that and ensure that oversupply does not lead to a downgrade in quality.

Turning to social mobility, any graduate—my daughters, for example—will be in the marketplace for 50 years. That is an awfully long time and not one person who comes to this place will have had the same job for

50 years. We need to take a more flexible approach. We have spoken too much about the young—important though they are and mother of loads as I am—but mature students and part-time students also have needs. The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) mentioned the statistics for Oxford and Cambridge, but he failed to take account of the fact—this is the crux of the argument—that some of the young people to whom I speak in my constituency are looked-after children, family carers and mothers. They do not have the flexibility just to choose a university. That is why reputation, quality and availability are so important. This is not about being able to go to top-flight universities; it is about being enabled to rise.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Lady stimulates me to intervene. It is very dangerous to talk about top-flight universities. I represent Huddersfield, which has a wonderful university with some of the best departments in the country, including for design, innovation and engineering. It is very easy to say what is top flight and what is not. Many of our departments are better than those at Cambridge, and I am sitting next to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner).

Jo Churchill: Indeed you are. The words “top flight” came from the top of my head and I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman. My daughters have enjoyed red brick universities, but my friends’ children have been to all manner of providers, including good further education colleges and good apprenticeship schemes. There are fewer degree apprentices at the moment, because that system has not filtered through. More than anything, people need the appropriate qualifications.

I do not want to go on about the statistics around white young men and those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, because they speak for themselves. I would instead like to articulate the situation of career changers: mature members of our society who, in their 30s and 40s, when they have mortgages and children, want to change careers. That includes the nurses who want to become doctors, and the parliamentarians who want to become teachers.

John Pugh: Where are they?

Jo Churchill: Exactly. All manner of people who might want to take a different career path are precluded from doing so because they cannot get the appropriate qualifications, and we need to look at that. I was lucky when I did my MSc as a mature student, because I lived in Nottingham. The hon. Lady whom I followed; I am sorry, I cannot remember her constituency—[HON. MEMBERS: “Walthamstow!”]. She spoke articulately about need, and made a good point about the 3% in the system being such a small number, and it is. However, when I was a mature student under the previous Labour Government, I could not access support to help me with nursery fees for my four small children or to help me with my MSc. Things have not got better, and the Bill will allow us to start to push things forward. So although I am open to criticism, I think that what the hon. Lady said was a little unfair.

Earlier in the debate, Members spoke about collaboration and the need to make collaboration mandatory for institutions, and I would like to use East Anglia as an

exemplar of joined-up thinking. Next to us sits Cambridge University, which has the most money for research; the University of East Anglia is a leading university in Norfolk; and the new University Campus Suffolk, which has just been granted the ability to award degrees, is a community university. That blend offers people choice. That university in Suffolk, which has a campus in my constituency, has a member of the LEP and the local authority on the board. We need to encourage that sort of thing rather than making collaboration mandatory. They talked to further education providers, schools and businesses about how to fill the gaps in IT and engineering and to boost productivity, looking at nuclear power, farming, health and care. That is what I want the Bill to support.

5.22 pm

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I echo the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) in welcoming the fact that the Minister survived the ministerial cull and is still in his place, because I think he has brought a—[*Interruption.*] He is defying my words at the moment; I was going to say how good he is at listening. I am over here!

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Will the Front Benchers take note of this? The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) is making reference to the Front Benchers, and they appear to be having a conversation. I am sure that everybody wants to hear what the hon. Gentleman wants to say.

Mr Sheerman: My hon. Friend was trying to be nice.

Paul Blomfield: I will continue to be nice, because I recognise the thought and effort that the Minister has put into developing the Bill. I commend him for the way in which he has listened to those across the sector and other stakeholders in shifting thinking, as discourse has moved forward. There is a lot more listening to do, because there are still a number of reservations.

The Bill raises some very important issues: on teaching quality, clearly; on widening participation; on reopening the debate on credit accumulation and transfer; and on several other areas. Sadly, however, as other hon. Members have highlighted, those are not necessarily the key challenges for the sector right now. The Secretary of State was right to say in her opening remarks that our university system punches above its weight. Our universities are hugely important in the transformational impact they have on those who study in them, in building the skills base of our country and in contributing over £11 billion to our export earnings, and this hugely successful sector of course contributes through research and innovation to the wider development of our economy. We have one of the world’s best university systems, but universities face real challenges, many of which, frankly, are not covered by the Bill.

Let me turn back to Brexit. The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds said that we should look at the opportunities of Brexit. Whether we describe them as opportunities or as challenges, there are real issues to face. She highlighted the fact that we are in the top 10 for research. One reason for that is the enormous funding we have had through FP7—Horizon 2020, as it is now—from the European Union. The EU is spending

[Paul Blomfield]

about £70 billion through Horizon 2020, and until 23 June more was allocated to British-led partnerships than to any other member state. Without that, our research capacity will be deeply affected, with huge economic consequences.

The Minister will recall that I asked him, just days after the Brexit vote, what action he was taking to protect that funding. Reassuringly, he said that we should not worry about anything for the next couple of years because we would still be in the European Union and fully accessing Horizon 2020. That was not an unreasonable answer at that moment—I would have probably given the same one—but when I talked to the vice-chancellors of my two universities in Sheffield two days later, they both reported that locally led research teams had been asked to pull out of trans-European projects bidding for Horizon 2020, because a UK research teams would be a drag on securing funding, given all the associated uncertainty. Mike Galsworthy, who is the director of Scientists for EU, has been trying to monitor the impact on research. He reports that already—just a couple of weeks on—of the 378 responses he has received from research teams, over a quarter are reporting difficulties because everyone fears the risk of having a team from non-EU Britain as a partner.

The Government therefore need, and I hope that the Minister will address this when he winds up, to consider urgently—more urgently than many of the other issues covered by the Bill—what he intends to do to offset the impact we are already seeing. He should commit to underwriting all Horizon 2020 funding to give research teams the reassurance that they can go forward confidently without letting down their partners. He should also talk to those quite close to him—[*Interruption*] I was thinking of a different form of relationship, but that one will do—about making an early commitment to putting Horizon 2020 at the top of the agenda in our negotiations on what post-Brexit Britain will look like.

The second issue is about recruiting and retaining talent. Between our two universities in Sheffield, there are 406 EU nationals on a salary of less than £35,000. That figure is important because it means that they would not meet the criteria for successful tier 2 visa applications. These are early-career academics—the talent of the future—who will be driving the research and the teaching quality of the future in our universities. Unless we can give them the confidence that they and their successors from European countries can come to this country to work, teach and research in our universities, we will be severely weakening our talent base.

Such issues are not addressed in the Bill, but it threatens to do more damage in the third area of concern in universities, which is international students—an issue on which the Minister and I agree, and about which many Government Members have made the same point. As the right hon. Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) pointed out, the Home Office has done enormous damage to our ability to compete in the growing international marketplace to recruit international students. Brexit threatens greater damage in relation not just to the 185,000 EU students who are here, but to the 320,000 or so non-EU students. Hobsons, the major international student recruitment consultants, reported just a couple of weeks before the Brexit vote that about a third of

non-EU nationals considering coming to the UK would find Britain a less attractive place to study if it exited the European Union, and one can understand why.

The Bill could make the situation worse by undermining the strength of the UK's university brand through the teaching excellence framework. A one-level TEF might not have that consequence, because it would be a straightforward exercise that, subject to ticking certain boxes, most universities would glide through. However, the subsequent grading system creates a risk of brand damage, because we are developing it unilaterally. If we were measuring our universities equitably in parallel and in partnership with every country in the world, perhaps it would be different, but we are not. We are stepping outside what our competitors are doing and saying that we will spotlight our universities in a very different way. We will say that some are okay, some are outstanding and some are excellent. That will send out the message about those that do not reach the very top grade that international students ought to think twice about going there. I appreciate that that is not the Government's intention, but it is a potential consequence that they need to consider closely. We already have a quality assurance system through the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education that is widely respected around the world.

If the Government are going down the TEF route, let us get it right. The thinking on this is significantly underdeveloped. I welcome the way in which, during the discussion about teaching quality, the Minister has moved away from an overdependence on quantitative metrics towards a more qualitative approach that involves institutions in the assessment process. However, there is still a focus on quantitative metrics that, as other Members have highlighted, are deeply flawed.

Employment destination is a key metric, but we all know that that is an unsatisfactory way of measuring teaching quality. Someone who comes from the right family, goes to the right school, goes to the right university and comes out with a passable degree will get a good job, because they have the contacts. [*Interruption.*] I did not catch the Minister's observation, but I have no doubt he will make his point later. Employment destination might be a measure of the privilege someone was born into, but it is not a measure of teaching quality. We know that privately educated students are more likely to get a good degree than state educated students. We also know that graduate destination can be affected by the regional economy, so it is a very unsatisfactory metric.

In trying to widen participation, I admire the Government's focus not simply on entry to university, but on success at university and beyond. However, using retention as a metric is potentially flawed, because the easiest way—I am not for a moment suggesting that any of our universities would do this—to get a good retention score is not to accept students who are likely to fail.

Jo Churchill: I agree with that point. A problem with the lack of flexibility in the system is that it does not allow those who have more disconnected lives to be iterative with a degree by going out and back in. That is a problem if Members across the House want to improve social mobility. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to be more flexible to allow those whose lives do not conform to the three-year pattern to have access?

Paul Blomfield: I agree with the hon. Lady—I thank her for her intervention, which, like much of the rest of the debate, reflects cross-party concern about the detail of the Bill.

Other hon. Members referred to the research excellence framework as a model for the TEF, but the research excellence framework took time to develop—there was trial and error, remodelling and rethinking. The research excellence framework was not put together with the pace that the TEF has been put together, and nor was it put together without trialling or in a way that creates such risks. That is why, as the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) said, the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee said that the Government needed to do more to demonstrate that the metrics relate to teaching quality. Until they do, we cannot be confident that we will get this right.

The Secretary of State said that there was limited thinking among the Opposition, in that we thought that new providers could not possibly be as good as traditional universities. I do not accept that. Equally, I hope the Government accept that there are risks. In the last Parliament, they got their fingers burnt with new providers. We have seen in the higher education landscape in the United States, which some fear is the model the Government are looking to, the damage caused by an insufficiently well regulated system, in which commercial operators come in, milk the public funds provided through the federal loans system without regard to the quality of education offered or the consequences for those who go through it, and leave them to pick up the debt. Everybody was misled at each stage of the process, which is why so many private providers face federal and state prosecution in the United States. Unless we get the regulatory framework right in the Bill, there will be risks.

I know the Minister is committed to getting the regulatory framework right, but the problem is that we do not know what it will look like. I have asked written questions about it, but we still do not know. He can correct me if I am wrong, but in response to a recent written question, he indicated that we will not know what the regulatory portal and subsequent framework look like in detail until the Bill passes. That is not good enough.

I am conscious of the time and of other Members' desire to contribute. There is so much more in the Bill, but I will leave my remarks there.

5.37 pm

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield)—I should call him my hon. Friend—who is the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on students. I am the vice-chair, and it is a pleasure working with him to champion students across our country. I agree with some of the points he made.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on continuing in his position, on his work over the past year in championing the Bill, and on engaging with the sector more than any other Minister for Universities and Science. That is to his credit and to the credit of the Secretary of State, who spoke earlier. It was great to see her on the Front Bench.

When black people and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds struggle to get on in life, the Conservative party has a responsibility to put our country

together again and focus on unity. All the key components of that one nation narrative can be applied coherently to the Bill. We have a responsibility, as I have seen in conversations with my hon. Friend the Minister and when reading the Bill, to ensure that those who have not necessarily had the best start in life can get on. That is a deep Conservative message of aspiration.

My parents never went to university; I was the first one in my family to go. My father was the breadwinner and my mother was disabled. In the 1980s, my parents aspired to become a middle-class family by saving up enough money to get me and my brother through university. Now my brother is a doctor and, well, I am here. That is a great testament to my parents and their determination over the years. As a new MP, I want to enable others in my constituency to follow their own dreams. That is why I rise today in wholehearted support of the Bill.

The changes to the higher education system in 2011 aimed to improve the student experience and the teaching they receive. On the whole, the changes have improved the higher education system, encouraging more students to go to university and improving social mobility. It became clear, however, that the regulatory system did not match what students wanted. There is a need to create a body to check that universities are using the increased funds to improve teaching and resources.

The opportunity to gain a degree in a subject you enjoy or that will help to get the career of your dreams is important for so many in the United Kingdom. The experiences gained in one of our higher education institutions, whether at the age of 18 or as a mature student, are invaluable and often changes people's lives. I am pleased that a record number of students are going to university as a result of the cap being lifted, with them taking the opportunity to advance their minds as well as themselves. However, these students must be the focus of the university. This long-awaited Higher Education and Research Bill will put students at the heart of the regulatory system. The office for students will be able to monitor and improve institutions. It is set to be full of experts in the field, who can judge the quality of teaching being given by universities.

I am proud to represent a city that has two world-leading universities: Bath Spa University and the University of Bath, which is ranked one of the best universities for student satisfaction year-on-year. I do not want other MPs to try to take that accolade away from us, but good luck. I am concerned, however, about my young constituents who travel elsewhere and do not necessarily get a teaching experience comparable to the fees they end up paying.

Going to university is a big financial investment and students need to be safe in the knowledge that there is a body to ensure that they receive excellent quality teaching that will set them up for a superb graduate life. The new framework and the office for students will monitor teaching quality and provide broad ideas about how best quality teaching can be achieved. This will be done without telling an institution how it should teach or assess or what content should be in their courses. That independence for universities is crucial, as it means they can maintain the individual flair that attracts students, while providing excellent teaching. The new scrutiny will provide an assurance to students about the excellence of the teaching they will receive, and that they will have the skills that employers are looking for. In the west of

[Ben Howlett]

England, the G4W group of universities is working closely to ensure that businesses and universities work together to deliver skills in the interests of our regional economy. That example will be improved and enhanced across the rest of the United Kingdom as a result of the framework in the Bill. I hope other areas of the country, with their devolved settlements, will be able to deliver just that.

I want to turn to the teaching excellence framework, the measure by which the teaching quality of universities will be assessed. The new framework will finally bring together teaching in line with funding for research, as teaching funding will be linked to quality, not just quantity. That is important, as it prevents universities from focusing too much on mass, often sub-par education, and ensures that those they invite to study are their priority. I have to admit that when I speak to students up and down the country—this has been the case since 2011—many student bodies and student union organisations say time and again that fees have increased but the quality of education and teaching has not necessarily increased with them. That has been a great frustration for students.

It is important that the Government make it clear well in advance what makes a good course value for money, so that universities can tweak their current practices using the guidance provided. It will be difficult to measure such different styles, even across the leading universities, but I urge the Government to come up with a coherent, easy-to-understand set of qualities and priorities that universities can install, so that they can be confident of receiving the highest quality rating. I hope that in Committee we can focus on the quantitative, not just the qualitative side, which obviously has come up several times, and which no doubt the Minister will talk about when he sums up.

The university quality rating will be an invaluable tool for prospective students choosing between the hundreds of higher education institutions across the country. Alex Neill from Which?, an organisation that exists to promote consumer choice and information, said:

“Our research has shown that students struggle to obtain the information they need to make informed decisions about university choices. We welcome measures to give students more insight into student experience, teaching standards and value for money... These proposals could not only drive up standards, but could also empower students ahead of one of the biggest financial decisions of their lives.”

Deciding to go to university is easy for some people, but not for everybody. It is a big decision—the choice of course or institution can make or break a person’s future—and there are many tools available that talk about student experience, teaching style and support, but it is difficult to compare teaching quality, and with all universities raving about how good they are, it is unlikely they would wish to champion such a tool. The Bill will provide students with invaluable and directly comparable data on the quality of teaching they can expect at each institution. I would have found such information incredibly helpful when I was making that choice.

Michelle Donelan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill gives students the opportunity not just to gamble and take a chance on their future but to

make an informed decision so that they might have the best opportunities in life and get real value for money?

Ben Howlett: I completely agree with my hon. Friend and near neighbour. Since 2011, students have said many times that they want more information, and in this digital age, it should not be too difficult to go online and find out in one place what information is available to help them make these choices. I hope that the Careers and Enterprise Company will end up streamlining careers advice and guidance, but the Bill will put at the heart of the system the student making that choice with the information freely available to them.

When fees rose in 2011, teaching quality was supposed to improve with it, and this new regime focusing on teaching quality will be supported by the cap on the fees that a university can charge if it is not hitting the highest teaching quality. This power provides a good stick to prevent universities from disregarding teaching quality, which I know the universities sector has long championed. I have been contacted by key stakeholders in the universities sector concerned that, although they are keen to offer students the best value for money and excellent teaching, these changes will come at the expense of the postgraduate sector, particularly the science, technology, engineering and maths research that is so crucial to our economic development—it is a main component of what the University of Bath specialises in. The Minister has provided me with reassurances, but I hope that he can reassure the entire House that the postgraduate sector will still be able to bloom, while teaching in undergraduate degrees improves.

I have focused on the measures that will improve the student experience. I turn now to the provisions in the Bill providing for more data on diversity and inclusion in our universities. As part of the registration process with the new office for students, it will be a condition that institutions publish admissions stats on gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Given the disconnect in our society at the moment, there is no better time to deliver on this crucial part of the Bill. The data will include the numbers of applications from these groups and—crucially—how many are accepted. I am sure that this publicity will encourage institutions to become increasingly inclusive and provide good tools to identify trends and what policies might be needed to address any shortcomings.

For too long students have been asking for better quality teaching. They want to get a degree, but they also want to receive the best quality education to equip them for their future careers. I am pleased that the Government have taken action, finishing what they started with their changes to higher education in 2011. Students can now be confident that their education is being scrutinised. I hope that the Bill will put students’ minds at rest and reassure them that their institution has good teaching quality and cares about the experience as much as the research side. Sadly, as we all know, this has not always been the case, and I am concerned that a lack of focus is sometimes left, with some students leaving university feeling quite deflated.

I urge all Members to do what the former shadow Business Secretary, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), unfortunately failed to do in the Queen’s Speech debate, when she failed to mention exactly what

students want. At the heart of that, this Government have listened to what students actually want. Students want to see better quality teaching and better quality of future outcomes. We should listen to the students and what they are asking for. Ultimately, the Bill delivers on that, and I look forward to voting for it with the Government in the Lobby later today.

5.50 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett). Bath is another beautiful university city. I live in Cambridge, a city of universities. Of course, almost everyone knows of the University of Cambridge, and most people now know of Anglia Ruskin University, which has expanded and improved dramatically over the last decade, particularly under the excellent leadership of the recently retired Vice-Chancellor, Mike Thorne. In Cambridge, we have also enjoyed the Open University and the University of the Third Age, so there is something for everyone, and a precious eco-system that we do not want to risk being disrupted.

Cambridge also has a number of other educational establishments that feed off the Cambridge brand, and one of my concerns is that if we rush to encourage new providers, we must make sure that the quality of the Cambridge brand and others is not tarnished. I am told that when a similar exercise was undertaken in New Zealand a few years ago and a couple of new entrants did not stay the course, the reputational knock-on effect led to a drastic fall in foreign students for the established institutions over the following years—along, of course, with the consequent financial costs—so I say we should be careful here.

Let me start by following on from the excellent points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield). In facing the Brexit challenge, it is absolutely clear that the sector is suffering from instability and uncertainty. I echo the suggestion of many of my hon. Friends that now might not be the time for undertaking more major reforms. Our research institutions and universities currently face a real challenge to maintain our global reputation, and we should not make it any more difficult for them.

I am not saying that the existing regulatory frameworks in place for our universities and research are perfect. Of course they are not, and of course they could be simplified and improved. What I do say, however, is that now is the time for safeguards and support for our higher education providers and research councils—not for further disruption. Let us not rock the boat when we are already faced with such unsteady waters.

Plenty of people are making this point. Perhaps not surprisingly, the University and College Union has asked the Government to stop and wait. It sensibly called for an “immediate nonpartisan inquiry into how we can ensure that our colleges and universities remain open to staff and students from around the world.”

I rather agree. Even putting aside the minor matter of our uncertain place in Europe at the moment—one has to say, what price the great aspirations for the Bologna process and a pan-European higher education system?—there are real problems here.

The impact assessment for the Bill outlines that a single market regulator, the office for students, will be established and says that it will provide “competition, choice and the student’s interest at its heart”.

That sequence of phrasing raises a further problem—that competition is being put first, and the student’s interest put last. Let us take, for example, the provision that would see new entrants into the higher education market given the ability to compete on equal terms with existing institutions and to immediately possess powers to award their own degrees, albeit on a probationary basis. As I have suggested, there are real risks here. It could dilute the trusted UK brand, risking our country’s reputation for educational excellence on the international stage. The Public Accounts Committee has already found standards at some private providers to be lacking, saying:

“The Department has failed to protect the interests of legitimate students, and the taxpayer.”

The Russell Group has urged the Government to consider a longer period of enhanced scrutiny and peer review to help maintain the UK’s reputation and high standards, and I agree that ensuring the high quality of any institution afforded degree-awarding powers is paramount.

The increased marketisation that this proposal signifies could also threaten providers, and could, in some cases, lead to what we call “market exit”. That might be quite dramatic. The closure of such institutions, whether they are vocationally orientated or traditional international-facing universities, would have a significant, and possibly more than significant, impact on local communities and students. A survey undertaken by the now defunct Department for Business, Innovation and Skills showed that less than half of alternative providers had a student protection plan to implement in the event of “market exit”. Moreover, if providers fail, who will pick up the tab? What will be the effect on the other institutions? I think we need to know the answers to some of these questions.

The National Union of Students has called the marketisation of higher education a “failed experiment”, and has chastised the Government for trying to “turn students into consumers.” I hope that the Government will think again, and will recognise that creating a conveyor belt of higher education providers risks doing real damage to the dynamic, trusted institutions that have been built over so many centuries in our country.

The proposed teaching excellence framework will allow some universities to charge tuition fees rising in line with inflation. While it is fair, and welcome, to highlight the importance of teaching quality, the removal of the fee cap in what can only be described as a slightly underhand way is not very welcome. Another issue of concern relating to the TEF is the splitting of research and teaching oversight between the office for students and UK Research and Innovation. The Royal Society rightly points out that

“today’s PhD content is tomorrow’s course content”,

and, as the University of Cambridge tells me, the close and mutually beneficial relationship between teaching and research—their interdependency—is a central tenet of UK university excellence. Consequently, it is important for the TEF to recognise the value of research-led teaching in its assessment criteria.

I appreciate that the review of the research excellence framework is currently under way and expected soon, and I am sure we all await its conclusions on how the assessment of teaching and research quality will be streamlined and interlinked, but I think that there must be a strong requirement for co-operation between the office for students and UKRI.

[Daniel Zeichner]

The implications for wider research are profound. Let me say in passing that an omission in the Bill is the lack of provision for post-graduate student supervision: there is more to be said on that, I think. The Bill restructures our country's research base by revoking the royal charters of the current research councils and bringing them under the umbrella of the new body that will be created when UK Research and Innovation is merged with Innovate UK. Lord Rees, who has already been quoted today—a very wise voice from Cambridge, and a former president of the Royal Society—has observed that while reshuffling the administrative structure of our research councils is “seductive”, it “may not prove either necessary or sufficient, and may indeed be counterproductive.”

It is positive that the Bill at least hints at codifying a long-standing convention, the principle of dual funding, but many have observed that the wording is vague, possibly less clear than that in the White Paper, and that the “reasonable balance” referred to in the Bill is insufficient. I hope that the Minister can give us a stronger commitment today, because dual funding is key, and quality-related funding for research is essential.

The integration of Innovate UK into UK Research and Innovation also raises questions. While we are assured that Innovate UK will retain a separate budget and its own business-facing outlook, I think I am right in saying that Members of the House of Lords have already queried the merger and its impact on the independence of the research councils. I am sure that that will be examined closely in Committee.

Let me end by returning to my opening observations. Our research community is already under great pressure, despite the Government's reassurance that the European referendum result has “no immediate effect” on those applying to or participating in Horizon 2020. As a net recipient of EU funding, science research in particular will be hit hard by Brexit, and although the Universities Minister said recently that “nothing has changed overnight”, we are hearing just the opposite from those on the front line of research in our country, as other Members have observed. We are hearing that—literally overnight—they have been forced to the back of the queue when it comes to forming the collaborative links with European partners that are necessary for applications for EU research grants.

Research and higher education are intimately intertwined with free movement, European alliances and investment, but we may still be years away from knowing what kind of settlement will finally emerge. Before we can begin to think about reforming our vital higher education and research sectors, we must be absolutely sure of our place in Europe and in the wider world. The Government say that it is business as usual, but I say that these sectors are just too important to our country's economy, and to our society, for us to take further risks in such uncertain times.

6 pm

Michael Gove (Surrey Heath) (Con): As a new Back Bencher, I feel fortunate to have the chance to contribute to this debate; it has been well-subscribed, and conducted in the generous spirit one would expect of any education debate. And we have learned a lot, as we would expect

in any education debate. We have learned that the University of Aberdeen is staying true to its internationalist foundations at a time of change. We have learned that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) is that rare thing on the Conservative Benches, a *Guardian* reader. We have also learned from his skilled powers of observation that the new Secretary of State for Education is slightly less blonde than the Minister for Universities and Science, but one of the things his observation has reinforced in my mind is that bloneness is clearly a quality that brings preferment under this new Government—and I know where I went wrong.

I also thank the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden) for his contribution from the Front Bench for the Labour party. He was a distinguished editor of *History Today* and an outstanding Open University lecturer, but I fear that in his speech today he did not do himself justice. His speech was 45 minutes long, which is some 12 minutes longer than Mozart's longest symphony, and during those 45 minutes, while there was a great deal of criticism of the Government's proposals, there was precious little that was fresh, original or new in terms of policy vision. As an education reformer, he is not yet ready to join the ranks of Rab Butler, Lord Robbins or H.A.L. Fisher. It was a pity that instead of what we used to have from Labour—a comprehensive vision of education, education, education—we had instead prevarication, obfuscation and mystification. It is, I fear, sadly reflective of the condition in which the Labour party now finds itself—of the fact that a party that was once committed to the improvement of education, the extension of opportunity to all and radical reform to bring that about now has so little to say. That is not a criticism of the hon. Gentleman or indeed of those who spoke from the Labour Back Benches today; it is just an observation of the fact that where there was once intellectual fertility, there is now, sadly, aridity. But I wish my colleagues on the Labour Back Benches well as they try to ensure their party rediscovers its radicalism and policy vitality.

May I contrast the lack of ideas, fizz and energy on the Labour Front Bench with the qualities displayed by our new Secretary of State in her remarks opening this debate? I had the opportunity to remark earlier on the fact that our new Secretary of State has made extending social mobility the hallmark of all the roles she has taken in Government. She spoke eloquently and from the heart about her own personal journey and her commitment as a graduate of Southampton University and as a comprehensive school girl who was the first in her family to go to university to extend to others the opportunity she herself has enjoyed. It is a promising sign that she now leads a fused and reinvigorated Department for Education that covers the support of children from the moment of birth right up to the point at which they go on to an apprenticeship or into university. It was a mistake of Gordon Brown to separate universities—to make them orphans first of all in the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and then to have them spatchcocked into the business Department—because I feel an unnecessarily narrow and utilitarian approach was taken towards higher and technical education.

The restoration of a Department that sees education in the round and takes a holistic approach to human development and intellectual inquiry is all to the good,

and the Secretary of State is absolutely the right person to lead it, and the Minister for Universities and Science, who has already proved himself a distinguished higher education Minister, is the right person to take this Bill forward in Committee.

It is appropriate that we legislate at this stage because this Bill is a sequel, in a way, to the changes we introduced under the coalition. It was the Browne report into higher education finance and the decisions taken by my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr Cameron), and indeed Vince Cable when he was Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, that ensured that we were able to place the financing of higher education on a sustainable footing for the future. Almost uniquely among European nations, our higher education system is solvent as a result of the courageous decisions that they took. He will not thank me for mentioning it, but the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), displayed both courage and principle in rejecting his election promise and embracing the right policy outcome. Although he paid a political price for that decision, we should record that it was right, not just for the solvency of our higher education institutions, but also for access. As a result of those changes, more children from poorer backgrounds, and from working-class and disadvantaged homes, now go to university than ever before, and that is a direct result of the courage and coherence of the reforms that were made to funding. Having made those funding reforms, we must now complete the story and ensure reforms to the structure and quality of higher education, so that we maintain our position of global leadership.

Let us be in no doubt that universities across the United Kingdom are global leaders, and some of our finest institutions are among the top 20 universities in the world. Those include not just established institutions of great antiquity such as Oxford and Cambridge, but London's universities, which are outstanding in research, teaching and their capacity to improve our productivity. We are fortunate that changes in the Bill will ensure that the position of global leadership that we currently enjoy will only be enhanced.

I welcome the fact that the Bill will lead to the development of new challenger higher education institutions. As the Secretary of State made admirably clear, at every point in our history, whenever it has been suggested that we expand the number of higher education institutions, "small-c" conservative voices have always said that more would mean worse. The Anglican clergy used to insist on a monopoly on higher education learning through their stranglehold on Oxford and Cambridge, until a brave, utilitarian radical helped to set up University College London, and helped to break that monopoly and extend higher education.

Throughout the 20th century we had the establishment of the red brick, the plate glass, and the polytechnics into universities, and each of those steps was an exercise in the democratisation of knowledge. It is a pity that in recent years, even though the University of Buckingham has taken its place among universities as a first-class institution, we have not had the same innovation and new institutions being created, but this Bill makes that possible.

There is, of course, an absolute requirement for new institutions to meet a quality threshold that ensures that public money and intellectual endeavour are well directed,

and that is why I welcome the principle of the teaching excellence framework. Those on the Opposition Front Bench criticised the Minister of State for being a listening Minister and wishing to consult, while simultaneously suggesting that he was somehow closed-minded and rigid in his desire to ensure that we compare like with like. Let me come to the Minister's defence—he does not need me to defend him because logic will suffice. The teaching excellence framework has been subject to extensive consultation. That consultation closed just over a week ago on year 2 of the TEF, and in that document of more than 60 pages a series of detailed questions were asked, all of which followed intense engagement with those working in higher education. It was a model for how a Department should consult, and the Minister has shown himself to be a listening, pragmatic and empirical steward of his responsibilities. The TEF has and will evolve as it should in the best traditions of the Department.

The idea that we should somehow object that the TEF allows us to compare different types of institutions is a fundamental misunderstanding. The hon. Member for Blackpool South said that it was a one-size-fits-all approach, but it is explicitly not that, as the consultation makes clear. It is an opportunity to allow individual institutions to be compared in a way that allows meaningful lessons to be drawn for undergraduates and for the Government.

Mr Marsden: Let me make it clear that we were not saying that the TEF was a one-size-fits-all measure. We were saying that the basis on which it was going to operate during the first year was one size fits all. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will remember that I went on to talk about the need for the TEF to be more disaggregated so that we could look at it within universities. That process might yet come forward.

Michael Gove: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that clarification. Indeed, in the constructive spirit in which most of this debate has been held, I welcome what he says and entirely accept that this is a move towards greater consensus.

One concern that people sometimes have about an emphasis on quality is that it somehow runs counter to the important principle of access, and that there somehow has to be a tension between maintaining rigorous teaching and research quality in an educational institution and broadening access. I do not think that there is necessarily a tension between the two, and neither do those who lead our universities. It has been conspicuous, over the past six years and beyond, how energetic vice-chancellors and others have been in ensuring that they can broaden access to higher education.

I would make the point, however, that while universities have worked hard and collaborated with the Department for Education in its previous incarnations to try to influence the curriculum and examinations in such a way as to maximise access to the benefits that higher education can bring, still more could be done. I do not accuse any institution or individual of bad faith, but I believe that there is additional potential for higher education institutions to, as it were, get their hands dirty in the business of improving secondary education. As I have mentioned, King's College London has helped to set up a new maths free school which will ensure that

[Michael Gove]

gifted students from across the state sector have an opportunity to graduate to the mathematic and scientific degree courses that our country needs. It would be a wholly good thing if more universities were to follow the example of those that have been in the lead in sponsoring academies. In saying that, I am simply reiterating the case that has already been made so brilliantly by my Friend in the other place, Lord Adonis.

As well as ensuring that we improve access, the Bill makes it clear that academic freedom must be defended. The National Union of Students—a distinguished former president of which sits on the Opposition Benches—has often been an effective steward and safeguard of undergraduates' interests. At the moment, however, there are voices and individuals within the NUS who have not upheld the best traditions of academic freedom and who have in some respects created a chilling environment and a cold home for students, particularly those who are Jewish. I applaud the work that has already been done by the Minister of State in ensuring that academic freedom is not simply an abstract question of academics being allowed to publish, debate and discuss, and that it must also be about ensuring that our universities are places where individuals can feel confident that they are respected and that their intellectual journey will be allowed to proceed in safety, whatever their background.

That brings me to my final point. A number of speakers in the debate have talked about Britain's departure from the European Union as though it were a cataclysm the like of which this country had never endured before—a sort of Noah's flood that will bring devastation to our institutions. I respect the fact that passions were engaged during the referendum debate and that those who argued that we should remain were sincere in their belief that leaving the European Union would bring problems and challenges for our higher education institutions. All I would say is that if we look at continental Europe—I mean no criticism of those countries—we can see that there are no world-class universities in the eurozone that could take their place alongside the universities of this country or indeed of the United States of America or south and east Asia.

The spirit of intellectual inquiry—and, indeed, international collaboration—that marks out all our best universities globally does not depend on membership of any political union or subscription to any bureaucratic system. It depends on a belief in honest inquiry, a desire to go where the truth takes you and a commitment always to have an open mind to new facts, new experiences and new people. I am confident that those who lead our universities will take the opportunity that the Bill gives them to ensure that the superb work they do remains open to students from across this world, so that our higher education sector, which has done so much to strengthen our economy and to make this country such a very special place, can proceed into the future with confidence.

6.14 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) after his relatively recent return to the Back Benches. Whatever disagreements the Opposition may have had with his various policies over the years, it is

encouraging to see that while the Government may have lost his voice the House has not, as we have seen in recent days. I am sorry to have to associate myself with his remarks about the National Union of Students, in particular its lack of care towards Jewish students and Jewish representation. It is sad day when I find myself agreeing with the right hon. Gentleman on that.

UK higher education is a global success story, but that success has been put in jeopardy by the decision to leave the European Union. Our institutions currently have 125,000 students and 43,000 staff from other EU member states. Since the creation of the Erasmus scheme, some 200,000 British students have benefited from opportunities to study abroad. Our membership of the EU has added 15% to our universities' income, not least through the £687 million in research income, from which the UK benefits disproportionately as a result of our strength and excellence in research. Against that backdrop, leaving the European Union provides significant challenges for the sector, and the Bill introduces unnecessary risk and uncertainty that the sector can no longer afford.

With some notable exceptions, this House needs a degree of modesty about the lack of scientific expertise across its Benches and should draw wisdom instead from expertise in the House of Lords. The dual support system for funding research in our universities has been vital to our higher education sector's success, so we should pay particular heed to the warnings of the Astronomer Royal Lord Rees, already referred to in this debate, from prior to the referendum when he described changes to the research councils outlined in the Bill as “drastic.” He was right then, but he is even more right today. It is a risk, a distraction, and an unnecessary reorganisation that we cannot afford. When winding up, the Minister ought to tell us what benefits this huge disruption will bring because it seems that any potential benefits are far outweighed by the costs.

The Bill continues apace the marketisation of our higher education system, which has been allowed to go unchecked without sufficient protections and rights for students for far too long. Nowhere is that more evident than in the provisions to allow new private providers to set up shop with degree-awarding powers from day one. What would stop the Donald J. Trump university opening in the UK? It could have degree-awarding powers from day one and then, a few years down the line, following inspection—I am sure that the Donald J. Trump university would not stand up to much—let us assume that it just chooses to up sticks and reinvest somewhere else. What protections and safeguards would there be for students?

The White Paper and the Bill refer to protection and the possibility of the OfS awarding degrees. I am proud of the degree that I got from my university—it is unlikely that my university would go bust, but we would certainly be in trouble if it did—but the idea that people who work hard at their chosen university for a degree could suddenly find that their certificate reads “Office for Students” instead of the name of their university is not reassuring. Students have for too long been an afterthought in the debate around reform of the higher education sector.

Turning to the office for students, its name is on the door, but there is no seat at the table for students. It is entirely unjustifiable to call something the office for students when there is no guaranteed representation for

students. There was an entire White Paper called “Students at the Heart of the System” and the new Secretary of State used that exact phrase in her opening remarks, but students barely get a mention in the sector’s accountability regime. We should ensure, as a bare minimum, that student representation on the board of the office for students is guaranteed. It may well be that in the current climate that place is not reserved for the NUS specifically, but there are plenty of able student representatives in higher education institutions across the country and they deserve a seat at the top table.

Let me give a broader critique of the sector and what it has done for students. I bow to no one in my love and passion for the UK higher education sector, which is a national and international success story. I have been involved in debates on higher education for some time, so forgive me if I am impatient at the fact that we are still talking about problems that have existed for many years. Too many of our academically elite universities remain socially elite. I get frustrated when I hear of so-called “widening participation success stories” from institutions that have appalling retention data and graduate destination data.

The right hon. Member for Surrey Heath alluded to the fact that the benefits, purpose and value of higher education have always extended beyond simple utilitarianism, and whether that is about graduates getting jobs or companies getting patents, there is a bigger vision and mission. It is about the exploration of humanity, expanding our horizons, having a deeper understanding of ourselves, our culture and our society, and pushing the boundaries of scientific exploration. But we should never forget that for many students, particularly those from backgrounds like mine, although it is of course lovely to go to university and make new friends and to engage in a deeper knowledge of one’s subject, it is also essential that that higher education experience delivers the transformational impact that is so often promised when students apply but that can so often be found lacking afterwards.

Too many institutions are too prepared to pat themselves on the back just for taking students from some of the most deprived communities, be they working-class communities, black and minority ethnic communities, disabled groups or other groups that are under-represented in HE and face particular disadvantage in society. The institutions then take their money, process them through the university conveyor belt and cast them off into the world with no real benefit to their earnings, and with these students having no real sense of direction or purpose in their lives. For too many students, on too many courses, that is the direction taken, and it is simply not acceptable or justifiable. The Government, we in this House and the accountability regime for higher education need to be more robust in challenging that institutional failure.

I am also frustrated about what is happening to so many of the concessions that students and student leaders fought for and won in successive battles, be they on the introduction of tuition fees in 1998, on the introduction of top-up fees in 2004 or on the coalition reforms. So many of the concessions we won—the reintroduction of grants for the poorest students, the increase in the repayment threshold so that it was more generous and even the introduction of the independent Office for Fair Access itself—are being too readily and

rapidly undone. That is a betrayal of the promises made by successive Governments, and I would like to suggest a number of changes.

If I were in the Minister’s shoes today, I would be dropping this Bill and starting again. There are three areas in particular where the Government need to do some serious rethinking: funding and finance; transparency and accountability; and the global role of HE. On funding and finance, we have already seen the difficulties presented to departmental budgets and the demands on the Treasury when even simple miscalculations in the assumptions when the resource accounting and budgeting charge and on the level of repayments are made.

I do not wish to rehearse the debate, but we must be honest about the fact—there is an absence of any compelling evidence to the contrary—that the view before the referendum among the overwhelming majority of economists in this country and around the world was that if the UK put it itself on a different course, that would undoubtedly leave the country less well-off than it might otherwise have been. In that context, and given the pressures that will inevitably follow on jobs, inward investment and the labour market, a particular risk is placed on higher education budgets. If graduates are not earning as much as they might otherwise have been, that means less money in the repayment system going back to the Treasury and more pressure upon departmental budgets.

As an opponent of the up-front tuition fee system, which I suffered from in part, the top-up fee system and the coalition’s further reforms, I think it is a terrible mistake that we have ended up with the present system, rather than with some form of proper graduate taxation. I am totally comfortable with the idea of paying more as a graduate and as a beneficiary of higher education. There are particular problems with the principle of having a sticker price up front and with some of the mechanisms of the repayment system that create significant risk for the Government. I am encouraged that others are still engaged in this debate. It is interesting that the Fabian Society has proposals for national insurance education accounts.

As well as looking at the repayment mechanisms, it is more important that we look at the issue of student maintenance. It is undoubtedly the case, as is well demonstrated by NUS evidence, that too many students within the higher education system, particularly those from poorer backgrounds—not necessarily the poorest, but those from low and middle income backgrounds—struggle to make ends meet. If they find themselves stacking shelves or, as I did, working at Comet, now defunct, to fund my higher education course, there is a cost not just in the time taken at work. There is an opportunity cost, because if students are stacking shelves or pulling pints, they are not in the library, the lecture theatre, sports clubs or student societies and activities—all those opportunities that lead to personal enrichment and success later on in the workplace. It should be a serious cause for concern that too many students still struggle to make ends meet.

We could be far more creative with the current system. I particularly commend to the Minister and the new Secretary of State the proposals put forward by Lord Adonis and Josh MacAlister, the chief executive of Frontline, that where there are shortages in key public sector professions, we should look at what we could do

[*Wes Streeting*]

by way of remission of repayment of tuition fees. If there was a shortage of social workers in Greater Manchester, for example, and there were graduates who were willing to go there and stick at it, the Government should cover the cost of their tuition fee repayments. There is plenty of scope to think about how to get the best and the brightest graduates into some of our most challenging professions.

On funding and finance, which we debated in Westminster Hall yesterday, it would be unforgivable for the Government to accept the principle that it is okay for Ministers to change the terms and conditions of student finance retrospectively. Not only is it fundamentally unfair to change the terms and conditions for existing students and graduates, but there is a huge risk. Students, especially those from the poorest backgrounds, and their parents and advisers need absolute certainty about what they are signing up for. If they feel that the Government are going to change the terms of the debate further on, that will bring with it serious risk.

On transparency and accountability, as I have mentioned, I think the transparency revolution should be extended to outcomes and graduate success. It is important that the director of the Office for Fair Access should report not just to the board of the office for students, but to this House, given the level of interest across the House. We should challenge some of the bodies associated with higher education about their commitment to transparency.

How can it be justified that UCAS, an organisation on whose board I was proud to serve for two years, when asked for reasonable datasets on applications, particularly from students from disadvantaged backgrounds, continues to supply data in the most inaccessible way possible? It is entirely possible for the very talented data wonks at UCAS to use Excel spreadsheets. They should provide Excel spreadsheets, rather than PDF documents, to people with legitimate demands for data. I hope it will not take an amendment to the Bill to get UCAS to behave more reasonably.

On student representation, as well as the office for students, there should be guaranteed student representation on a statutory footing on the designated quality body and on the governing bodies of higher education institutions, and we should extend the provisions of the 1994 Act to private providers. I rather like the suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) for a student bill of rights in higher education.

We need accountability for the way that money is spent within institutions. One of the advantages of putting universities back into the Department for Education is that there is now an opportunity for Ministers covering schools, colleges and universities to look together at the issues of social mobility, widening participation and fair access to universities. I am tired of the hand-wringing of university vice-chancellors and their lobbyists, who claim that it is all the schools' fault that they cannot get poor Jimmy and Jane from the local state school into some of our academically elite universities. If it is all the school's fault, then I have a really good idea—take all the widening participation funding from higher education and put it into schools and early years, because vice-chancellors have made a compelling case for transferring it in that way. That is not to denigrate the excellent work

done by staff working on widening participation and student recruitment in institutions; they are some of the most passionate and dedicated staff in terms of changing the profile of the student body. However, there is scope to make different and better spending decisions. Universities ought to be justifying how they are spending the money and what its impact really is.

We should have more accountability around the scandal of unjustified pay hikes for university vice-chancellors. Our institutions are very ably led, but against the current backdrop of public finances, I cannot believe that these pay increases are justifiable. The Bill should go so far as to require universities not just to publish vice-chancellors' pay—a great public service provided by *Times Higher Education* magazine—but to publish pay ratios between the pay of the university vice-chancellor and the lowest-paid staff.

Finally on accountability, we need more clarity about market exit. What happens if these brave new providers go bust or simply shut up shop? There must be better requirements on these institutions to protect their existing students and their graduates.

On global higher education, we can be enormously proud of the role that our institutions play on the international stage. It has been beyond saddening to read of academics who are being told that their funding is at risk and of conferences that will no longer take place in this country because people feel that, by leaving the European Union, we are closing the door to the outside world. The Minister could do a number of things to address this, but none would be more powerful than removing international students from the net migration cap. There is an overwhelming consensus on that, with support on both sides of the House. The previous Home Secretary was an obstacle to this. I am sure that now she has walked through the door of No. 10, she is far more amenable to the idea as Prime Minister. In all seriousness, there could be no better signal to send to the rest of the world than to say that bright students from across the world are welcome to study here and will be embraced.

Those are just a few thoughts. I am anxious to hear from the Front Benchers, and particularly to hear the Minister's assurance that he will move on the issue of retrospective payments and changes to the student finance system.

6.32 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to say a few words in this debate and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who made an excellent speech that covered most of the points that I was going to raise. I have been asked to finish by 6.35 pm, and I will make sure that I do so. It is interesting that my hon. Friend said that we do not have many scientists on these Benches. I am one of the few scientists in Parliament; it would be nice to have some more of us.

First, I want to talk about students. As my hon. Friend said, yesterday we had a debate in Westminster Hall about detrimental changes to student loan repayments. Since 2010, students in our society have been treated in an unscrupulous and unfair way. They have rarely been consulted. Their voices seem to have been ignored throughout policy discussions, and this Bill seems to be

no different. The Government claimed that they set out to make student choice and student interests a central part of their agenda in reforming higher education, but unfortunately they seem to have fallen short on that promise. As my hon. Friend said, there is very little reference to students, or their voices, throughout this Bill. It introduces an office for students but does not mention student representation as part of it. It is absolutely vital that student voices be heard.

The other issue I wish to focus on is the result of the referendum. The parliamentary cycle will now be dominated by Brexit discussions. Until we know what Brexit actually means, and the relationship that we wish to have with and within the EU, this Bill cannot really make any progress. There are more than 125,000 EU students at UK universities, and non-UK EU nationals make up 11.6% of all students at master's level. International students alone contribute £3.7 billion to the economy. What should happen not only to current students but to prospective students with regard to visa, loan and placement requirements after the 2016-17 academic year? There is no clear and concise policy. Many of the brightest minds come to study at our world-class institutions, and we should look not only to bring them here, but to keep their talents in the UK after they have graduated.

In his research review for the Government, Professor Paul Nurse warned that leaving the EU would jeopardise the world-class science for which the UK is known and that it therefore risked damaging the economy. We now need to discuss the question of retaining or replacing these assets.

6.35 pm

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State to her place, and I look forward to having constructive dialogue with her in the future.

We have heard many passionate and expert contributions. The hon. Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael), who chairs the Education Committee, said that he has found himself with an unexpectedly large portfolio. It is safe to say that I know that feeling. On that note, as my party's spokesperson on equality, as well as on education, I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) in urging the Government to make the necessary changes to ensure that loans are Sharia-compliant immediately. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response to her idea of amending existing legislation instead of making the change in this Bill.

We have spoken a lot about aspiration and supporting the next generation. I cannot help thinking about this evening's news about my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle). She has been a real friend to me and has been very supportive for many years, both inside and outside this House. She has told many women from backgrounds similar to mine, "Always stand up and reach for your dreams—you can achieve them." I pay tribute to her.

On the subject of legislative changes, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford East (Mr Smith) raised concerns that the office for students will be able to revoke Acts of Parliament and royal charters that establish universities. I hope that the Minister will think again on that.

It was great to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), who highlighted her career as a scientist, on which I congratulate her, and the need—we have heard this many times today—for the right funding and investment for science. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) also made an excellent contribution and spoke of the need for a technical revolution. I hope that the Minister will respond to his proposal for a duty to collaborate.

We also heard from a new Back Bencher, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove). We heard from him quite a lot. He did not like the length of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Mr Marsden), but perhaps that was because it lasted longer than his leadership bid. More seriously, he said that universities must be a safe place for Jewish students. As the shadow equalities spokesperson, I am in total agreement with him.

The right hon. Gentleman also said that he feared that Labour Front Benchers were no longer committed to extending opportunities to enable all young people to access further and higher education. I reassure him and others that we share that ambition. We all agree that no one should be denied the opportunity to study on the basis of their income, background, class, race or gender.

The question is whether the Bill meets that ambition. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) was clear that the Bill introduces unnecessary risks at a time of uncertainty. He also frightened me to death, and I am sure many others, with the prospect of a Donald J. Trump university.

Sadly, we regard the Bill as a missed opportunity that will set back the cause of equal access rather than advance it, expanding a higher education free market where profit takes precedence.

First, let us follow the money and look at maintenance grants and tuition fees. University education in England and Wales is already out of reach for many people from low and even middle-income families. The hon. Member for Stroud praised the German economy, but he will also be aware that in 2014 the last of the German states abolished tuition fees in public universities. The Sutton Trust, which campaigns for greater social mobility, has shown that many British students finish university with debts in excess of £50,000. The IFS has said that students will be repaying these debts until they are well into their 50s.

The Bill will directly lead to the uncapping of fees at high-performing universities, and it will effectively introduce a two-tier system of higher education. The best universities will become more expensive and therefore less accessible, at a time when the proportion of low-income students at many top universities is already falling. Quite simply, it is a tax on aspiration. The Government's equality impact assessment demonstrated the impact on already under-represented groups in higher education. It found that female, disabled, black, Asian and minority ethnic students, as well as mature students, would be disproportionately worse off.

The Secretary of State has made a great deal of the fact that more students from disadvantaged backgrounds are accessing higher education, but she conveniently ignored the figures highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy)—happy birthday,

[Angela Rayner]

by the way—which showed that the percentage of disadvantaged pupils admitted by seven of the 24 Russell Group universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, fell over the last decade. At the same time, pupils from private schools are still two and a half times more likely than their state school equivalents to enter a leading university. The Government will perpetuate and extend that by enshrining this two-tier system in the Bill. They are slamming the door of opportunity in the face of young people who have high aspirations and the talent to fulfil them.

I listened carefully to the words of the new Prime Minister on the steps of Downing Street just a few days ago:

“If you’re a white, working-class boy, you’re less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university. If you’re at a state school, you’re less likely to reach the top professions than if you’re educated privately.”

Yet this Bill does nothing to increase social mobility or to create the one nation Britain that she promised. We will judge her Government by actions, not words.

Then we come to the proposals in the Bill to expand the market for private providers, who are in the education sector primarily to make a profit. The Government appear ideologically committed to marketising higher education by promoting competition and introducing for-profit providers. They have taken a similar approach with schools, and I have yet to see any positive impact. This new profit-driven approach is a real threat to academic quality and standards at a time, post-Brexit, when it is even more critical to maintain and enhance the quality and reputation of Britain’s universities, as has been said by many Members from across the House, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). Experience from countries such as the USA and Sweden demonstrates that private providers too often seek to compromise quality for the sake of profit.

I am deeply concerned about the impact of the proposals on the terms and conditions of staff. There is already an unacceptable gender pay gap in the higher education sector, alongside the growing use of zero-hours, temporary and insecure contracts. I fear that the Bill will make matters even worse as employers seek to cut costs in order to produce profits.

Similarly, removing the limit on student numbers for university title is likely to lead to an increase in the number of smaller institutions. Perhaps that is the Government’s intention, but there is a concern that the new smaller institutions may be more likely to cut corners when it comes to resources, student-staff ratios, student support and attracting the best academic staff. What safeguards will the Government provide to prevent that from happening? There are many examples of poor-quality private colleges, particularly those that cater for overseas students, failing to provide high-quality courses. The Government must learn the lessons of those market failures and build in proper oversight and regulation to guarantee quality.

The Bill will also reform the research council and funding system, but we believe that that is poorly timed and likely to be ineffective. Brexit has already put the funding of academic research in the UK into a prolonged period of uncertainty.

Because of the time, I will cut my comments short. I share the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) about Horizon 2020 funding, and it is vital that we ensure confidence in our research sector.

It pains me to say it, but this Bill fails to give our young people a chance to soar. It blocks their path not because they lack ability or aptitude, but because they lack the necessary income or background. The Bill promotes a market-driven, two-tier higher education system in which too many of the brightest and the best will be consigned to second best.

On the steps of Downing Street, the Prime Minister promised:

“When it comes to opportunity, we won’t entrench the advantages of the fortunate few. We will do everything we can to help anybody, whatever your background, to go as far as your talents will take you.”

This Bill does not live up to that promise. Let us hold the Prime Minister to her words, and reject her Bill.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): This has been a terrific debate, in which there has been very strong consensus across the House that our universities rank among the very best in the world, our research base is a global envy and our higher education sector is generating the knowledge and skills that are fuelling our economy and providing the basis for our nation’s intellectual and cultural success.

However, there has also been an acknowledgment in all parts of the House that we can do better still. The world of higher education has changed fundamentally since the last major legislative reforms of 1992. With student number controls now lifted, we are in an era of mass higher education that is no longer limited to the academic elite within a small and primarily Government-funded set of institutions. The majority of funding for undergraduate courses now comes from the students themselves, via Government-backed loans.

The sector has long acknowledged that the current regulatory framework is simply not fit for purpose. We must do more to ensure that young people from all backgrounds are given the opportunity to fulfil their potential and the information they need to make good choices about where and what to study. The Bill provides stability and puts in place the robust regulatory framework that the sector itself agrees is needed. It joins up the very fragmented system of regulation across the current sector, giving us what will be a best-in-class regulatory framework.

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Joseph Johnson: I will not give away for the moment, because I have a significant amount of material to get through in a very limited time.

The Bill creates a level playing field, making it easier for new high-quality providers to compete with established degree-awarding universities. This will drive up innovation, diversity, quality and capacity, ensuring we remain attractive internationally. It will give students better access to information, empowering them to make the best choices

about where to study. It ensures incentives are in place for providers to focus on the quality of the teaching they offer to students.

This Government are committed to equality of opportunity for all. The Bill delivers on that commitment, with a renewed focus on access and participation for disadvantaged students. The new office for students will be required to consider equality of opportunity across the entire student lifecycle, and our reforms to the research landscape will deliver a system that is more agile, flexible and able to respond strategically to future challenges.

This afternoon, we have often heard concerns that now is not the time to proceed with the Bill and that we should press the pause button. That is wrong: the time is right to press ahead, and important sector representatives agree. As Maddalaine Ansell, the chief executive of University Alliance, put it in an article just the other day, the Higher Education and Research Bill

“is a raft that can take us to calmer waters”.

I urge Opposition Members to get on board.

The Bill delivers on pledges in the Conservative manifesto on which we were elected. It will provide stability for the sector, putting in place a robust regulatory framework. The sector has been calling for this legislation since the tuition fee changes were put in place during the last Parliament, and it welcomes the stability and certainty that the Bill will provide. As GuildHE, another representative body, has put it:

“Pausing on the Bill and risking further damage to our international reputation for quality through regulatory failure would be a mistake”.

Tristram Hunt: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way, because I appreciate that it is so annoying when someone interrupts your lecture. As we know, this is a Brexit Government, and many of the leading Cabinet Ministers promised not only £350 million a week for the NHS, but security for all our science funding. Will the Minister at the Dispatch Box give assurances to Staffordshire University and Keele University in my constituency that all their science funding will be secure by Brexit?

Joseph Johnson: I encourage Opposition Members to be optimistic about our future as a global leader in higher education and science. The UK has been at the centre of scholarship and science for hundreds of years. Many universities were powerhouses of scholarship long before the European Union came into existence, and I am confident that they will continue to be so for years and years to come.

Our universities are world leading and, although it is too early to say what the new EU settlement will be for science, I am confident that we will continue to thrive following the referendum result. That is why I have been engaging closely with Commissioner Moedas in Brussels and many other people in Governments across Europe, including my Italian counterpart. I welcome their commitment to ensuring that we will not be discriminated against in the period we find ourselves in. I welcome this morning's statement by the League of European Research Universities that British universities should not be viewed as a risk to research projects and that they will continue to be “indispensable collaborative partners” in the months and years ahead.

Turning to our rationale for opening the market in the Bill, it is generally accepted that competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game and offers consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) said in her excellent remarks, there is certainly room for improvement. Students' perception of value for money is continuing to fall. In the Higher Education Policy Institute student experience survey published last month, just 37% of student respondents felt that they received good value for money. That was down from 53% in 2012.

We need to address the fact that many students are starting to ask whether university is worth it. Many employers have similar questions when they look at the labour market mismatch in our economy. While employers are suffering skills shortages, especially in high-skilled STEM areas, at least 20% of graduates are in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating. If the students who are paying for the system and the taxpayers who are underwriting it are not completely satisfied, the market needs help to adapt. This we will provide as a Government. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who made an outstanding speech, I make no apology for seeking to expand higher education provision and give students more choice and more opportunities at every stage of their lives.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), I welcome the contribution that alternative providers are making and that they will be able to make all the more easily in future. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all model of university education. Students have a sharper eye for value than ever before and they are calling out, as my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) said, for pioneering institutions offering alternative educational models and an increased focus on skills that will prepare them for the future with the mindset and agility needed to fulfil roles that may not even yet exist. I welcome his engagement with the Milton Keynes institute of technology, which is a flagship for the challenger institutions that we want to come into the sector.

Critically, as other Members have stressed, it is vital that no institution is able to enter our system and access student finance without meeting the very high academic standards that we expect of the sector, as set out in the White Paper. On longevity, we expect institutions to meet the same financial sustainability rules that exist for incumbents. The Bill makes no changes to those demanding requirements. The reforms will, however, make it easier and quicker for new providers to enter the HE market. They will drive innovation, promote choice for students and increase opportunity, but they will also ensure that new providers can enter the market only when they demonstrate that they are able to deliver academic services of the quality that we expect.

The Bill reflects our determination to accelerate social mobility in this country through higher education. When we reformed the student finance system in 2011, some, including Labour Members, said participation would fall. In fact, the opposite has happened. We have a progressive student finance loan system that ensures

[Joseph Johnson]

that finance is no barrier to entry. It is working as a system. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are going to university at a record rate—it is up from 13.6% of the bottom quintile in 2009 to 18.5% in 2015. I am afraid Labour Members were wrong then and they are wrong now. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are 36% more likely to go to university than they were in 2009, but we can and must go further. Our new Prime Minister has rightly prioritised a country that works for everyone and not just the few.

Our reforms in the White Paper and the Bill support that ambition. The Bill introduces a statutory duty on the office for students to promote equality of opportunity across the whole higher education lifecycle for disadvantaged students, and not just at the point of access. That includes Oxbridge and other elite institutions, exactly as the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) would want us to ensure. We will bring together the responsibilities of OFFA and HEFCE for widening access into the new office for students. As part of that body, the new director for fair access and participation will look beyond the point of access into higher education and across disadvantaged students' entire time in higher education. We will also require higher education providers to publish application, offer and progression rates by gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background.

I welcome the cross-party support for our focus on teaching excellence. We are committed to introducing a teaching excellence framework in our manifesto because we want to drive up teaching standards throughout the sector. The Bill delivers on our pledge to drive up teaching quality and to provide students with robust, comparable information on where teaching is best in the system. It will rebalance the priority given to teaching and learning compared with research, and will mean that the funding of teaching is based on quality, not just quantity—a principle long and successfully established for the funding of research.

On the link between tuition fees and the teaching excellence framework, it is worth noting that the previous Labour Government raised tuition fees in line with inflation in every year from 2007 to 2010, regardless of teaching quality. We will allow fees to rise with inflation only for those institutions offering the highest-quality teaching. Maximum fee caps will be kept flat in real terms. We will allow them to increase only in line with inflation each year, as provided for by the Labour Government. Both Universities UK and GuildHE—expert sector groups—have made clear that allowing the value of fees to be maintained in real terms is essential if universities are to continue to deliver high-quality teaching.

Our reforms go well beyond education and also cover our research base. We have heard comments about our outstanding research base. Its strengths in adding to human knowledge and improving our lives are not in doubt. They will continue to be protected, but we have the opportunity to maximise the benefits of our investment through a strengthened strategic approach, removing the barriers to more inter- and multidisciplinary research, and ensuring that we capitalise on links between our research base and business. We have long recognised the contribution of science and research to our wellbeing

and wider economy. Our reforms build on those strengths, placing research and development at the heart of a national industrial strategy.

We have heard many passionate voices from both sides of the House today. The House can unite in support of the excellence of our universities and our research, but the Government are not willing simply to celebrate the excellence already achieved—we want it to continue and to build on it further. Our reforms will create a level playing field for new providers and increase competition in the system. We will encourage innovation in the higher education sector, transform the sector's ability to respond to economic demands and the rapidly changing graduate employment landscape, and ensure that we remain attractive internationally for decades to come. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 294, Noes 258.

Division No. 47]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Aldous, Peter	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Allan, Lucy	Cleverly, James
Allen, Heidi	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Amess, Sir David	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Andrew, Stuart	Collins, Damian
Ansell, Caroline	Colville, Oliver
Argar, Edward	Costa, Alberto
Atkins, Victoria	Crabb, rh Stephen
Baker, Mr Steve	Crouch, Tracey
Baldwin, Harriett	Davies, Byron
Barclay, Stephen	Davies, David T. C.
Baron, Mr John	Davies, Glyn
Barwell, Gavin	Davies, Dr James
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Davies, Mims
Beresford, Sir Paul	Davis, rh Mr David
Berry, James	Dinenage, Caroline
Bingham, Andrew	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Blackman, Bob	Donelan, Michelle
Blackwood, Nicola	Double, Steve
Blunt, Crispin	Dowden, Oliver
Boles, Nick	Doyle-Price, Jackie
Bone, Mr Peter	Drax, Richard
Borwick, Victoria	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Duddridge, James
Bradley, rh Karen	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Brady, Mr Graham	Dunne, Mr Philip
Brazier, Mr Julian	Ellis, Michael
Bridgen, Andrew	Ellison, Jane
Brine, Steve	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Brokenshire, rh James	Elphicke, Charlie
Bruce, Fiona	Eustice, George
Buckland, Robert	Evans, Graham
Burns, Conor	Evans, Mr Nigel
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Evennett, rh Mr David
Burrowes, Mr David	Fabricant, Michael
Burt, rh Alistair	Fernandes, Suella
Cairns, rh Alun	Field, rh Mark
Cameron, rh Mr David	Foster, Kevin
Carmichael, Neil	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Cartlidge, James	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Cash, Sir William	Frazer, Lucy
Caulfield, Maria	Freeman, George
Chalk, Alex	Fuller, Richard
Chishti, Rehman	Fysh, Marcus
Chope, Mr Christopher	Gale, Sir Roger
Churchill, Jo	Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Clark, rh Greg	Garnier, Mark

Gauke, rh Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Gray, Mr James
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, rh Ben
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matt
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, rh Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Mercer, Johnny
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 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
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 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
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth

Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Guy Opperman and
Mr Robert Syms

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Anderson, Mr David
 Arkless, Richard
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Beckett, rh Margaret
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Burnham, rh Andy
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Gregory
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Douglas
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clegg, rh Mr Nick
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, Rosie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Coyle, Neil
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Eagle, Maria
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Eford, Clive
 Elliott, Tom
 Ellman, Mrs Louise
 Esterson, Bill

Farrelly, Paul
 Farron, Tim
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Furniss, Gill
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Greenwood, Margaret
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Haigh, Louise
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Healey, rh John
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 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, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian

Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonagh, Siobhain
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McGovern, Alison
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Meale, Sir Alan
 Mearns, Ian
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine
 Morden, Jessica
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paisley, Ian
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve
 Rees, Christina
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Rotheram, Steve
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Shah, Naz
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sherman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simpson, David
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 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
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Turley, Anna
 Turner, Karl
 Twigg, Stephen
 Vaz, rh Keith
 Vaz, Valerie

Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Hywel
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Wilson, Sammy
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Sue Hayman and
 Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Higher Education and Research Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 13 October 2016.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration and proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on Consideration are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL (MONEY)

Queen's Recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Higher Education and Research Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(1) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by the Secretary of State; and

(2) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND RESEARCH BILL (WAYS AND MEANS)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Higher Education and Research Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the charging of fees payable by registered higher education providers and other institutions under the Act; and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

ENTERPRISE

That the draft Pubs Code (Fees, Costs and Financial Penalties) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 13 June, be approved.

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice Act 1988 (Offensive Weapons) (Amendment) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 14 June, be approved.

CLIMATE CHANGE

That the draft Carbon Budget Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 30 June, be approved.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

CLIMATE CHANGE

That the draft Climate Change Act 2008 (Credit Limit) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 30 June, be approved.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question put.

The Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until 20 July.

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Warm Home Discount (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2016, which were laid before this House on 4 July, be approved.—(*Christopher Pincher.*)

Question agreed to.

Mr Speaker: Order. I appeal to Members who are leaving the Chamber to do so quickly and quietly, in the manner of the hon. Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick), who is giving a fine example of seemly conduct to colleagues.

Cockling: Dee Estuary

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christopher Pincher.)

7.15 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Cockling in the Dee estuary is an industry that makes an important contribution to the local economy. Natural Resources Wales issues 53 full licences each year for the cockle fishery on the Dee. Last year 250 tonnes of cockles were landed there, producing a value of half a million pounds. The value of United Kingdom exports as a whole to other European Union countries was £4.2 million in 2015, with most of the exports going to the Netherlands and France. It is therefore important for us to protect the industry and the livelihoods that depend on it.

For the past year, my office has been in contact with local cocklers who have been hugely concerned about what has been taking place between Natural Resources Wales and the Environment Agency in England. I held a meeting with both organisations in my constituency office, at which it was agreed that the Environment Agency would be the first port of call for the cocklers on the English side of the river, and that it would raise the cocklers' concerns with Natural Resources Wales. This a question of democratic accountability, and the process governing responsibility for managing the cockle beds of the River Dee raises important issues.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned the 53 licences. Many people worked those beds for years, as did their fathers and grandfathers before them, and were not given licences, unlike many others who had not worked the beds before.

Margaret Greenwood: That is an interesting point. I certainly know that a number of families in my constituency have been involved in cockling for a great many years.

My constituents feel that the Environment Agency is not representing them adequately, and that, as Natural Resources Wales is an agency of the Welsh Administration, its responsibility is obviously to people in Wales rather than those in England. They have spent months making requests for access to the accounts showing the fishery costs, which have been released in a piecemeal fashion. They have made repeated requests to see the full accounts, but have been provided with only a summary, which has led them to conclude that the fishery is not being managed properly.

My constituents believe that they are being overcharged for their licences because Natural Resources Wales is not acting in a cost-conscious or effective way. They are concerned about the lack of scrutiny of NRW by the Environment Agency and the lack of attendance by EA representatives at meetings, and that is clearly an issue. After submitting numerous freedom of information requests, they were given sight of a document: references from the minutes and papers of the partnership board meetings to Dee Services and transfer of functions. The Partnership Board executive summary of 6 October 2015 states:

“NRW are under pressure from fishermen (who fish the Dee River Cockle Beds), for a meeting. NRW would like EA representation at this meeting but local EA staff are unwilling.”

[Margaret Greenwood]

The Environment Agency apparently pays £18,000 a year to Natural Resources Wales to manage the cockle fishery, but, according to my constituents, that figure never appeared in the accounts before 2015. I should like the Minister to tell me exactly how much the Environment Agency has paid Natural Resources Wales in each year since 2012, and how much scrutiny the Environment Agency is giving to how the money is being spent. The lack of oversight of the way in which money is spent is of real concern.

Last year I asked the Minister what enforcement measures the Department had undertaken in relation to illegal cockling on the River Dee, how many prosecutions for illegal cockling had been brought in each year since 2010, and how many prosecutions had been successful. The Minister replied:

“All cockle fisheries within the Dee Estuary are controlled via the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2008. Enforcement of the Order is a matter for Natural Resources Wales (NRW) as grantee of the Order.

Defra does not have information pertaining to the specific enforcement measures taken by NRW on illegal fishing occurring within this fishery.”

My follow-up question is this: why does Defra not have that information? It is paying NRW to manage the fishery, so it should have some interest in how the money is being spent.

More importantly, not only are my constituents paying for bailiff activities via their licence fee, they have also been told that it will pay towards unsuccessful prosecutions. I have asked the Minister how much the Department has spent on the management and enforcement of cockling rights in each year since 2010 and what information the Department holds on equivalent spending by the Welsh Government. The Minister’s response was to state:

“DEFRA does not hold this information.”

Why does it not hold this information? Last year the cockle beds were closed for quite some time, so I ask the Minister what discussions have taken place with the Welsh Government on, first, the management of fish, mussels, cockles and other seafood stocks in the river estuary; secondly the reasons for the closure of the cockle beds in the estuary; and, thirdly, the projected date for the reopening of the cockle beds?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The cockle industry is also important in my constituency. With advances in technology and environmental science there is great potential, but does the hon. Lady agree that ensuring that the jobs of local fishermen continue must be the priority for future legislation?

Margaret Greenwood: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and he makes a good point: it absolutely is important that we protect the jobs of those currently engaged in the industry, as they have been for generations.

To return to the Minister’s response, he stated:

“Fisheries is a devolved matter, and the Dee Estuary is a cross border fishery which is managed by the Welsh Government and Natural Resources for Wales for the Welsh part of the estuary. For the English part of the estuary, fisheries management is

covered by my Department, the Environment Agency, the Marine Management Organisation, and the North West Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.

However, Natural Resources for Wales (NRW) has responsibility for managing the cockle fishery in the Dee Estuary (on both the Welsh and English sides) as grantee of the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2008. NRW has taken the decision to not open the fishery this year due to insufficient stocks. It has suggested that it may be opened in July 2016 should sufficient stock be available. I have not had any direct dealings with counterparts in Wales within the Dee Estuary fisheries management context or specifically in relation to the closure of the cockle beds.”

Does the Minister believe it is fair for NRW to charge cocklers the full licence fee for a season when that season amounts to only a few days? Cocklers are not doing this as a hobby; this is their livelihood, and if they are unable to access the beds they have no income. The cocklers are concerned that under the bird food modelling system used by NRW, a closed season will become the norm but they will still be expected to pay for a full licence and eventually be driven out of business by this cost.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): My hon. Friend will know that on my side of the River Dee Welsh cockle fishermen who live in my constituency face the same pressures. I have written to Natural Resources Wales about the issue but have not had satisfaction either, so she has my full support in asking for rebates on the full price of the fee for seasonal work.

Margaret Greenwood: My right hon. Friend makes a good point: this issue affects fishermen on both sides of the estuary.

I remind the Minister of his own words in relation to farming. He said that

“farming has always been a risky business because of the weather and price volatility. Farmers want to earn their profit from the market but they need a helping hand when things go wrong.”

Are the River Dee cocklers any different? Figures provided to my constituents show that costs for managing the fishery have escalated since 2012 and staff time attributed to the cockle fishery has gone up. I ask the Minister to get the breakdown of what staff time is being allocated, for example, for administration and the cost of bailiffs. I also ask the Minister to look into why, when the fishery was closed for the majority of last season, figures obtained by my constituents show that £87,000 was allocated for staff time? Who is doing what, and why is the Environment Agency not providing any scrutiny of this figure?

Last year I asked the Minister how much revenue had been raised from licence fees for cockling in the River Dee estuary in each year since 2010 and the figures showed a big leap from 2012-13. In 2010 £51,584 was raised, in 2011 it was £52,576, in 2012 it was £52,576, and then in 2013 it increased to £68,900, and remained this figure in 2014. Will the Minister clarify whether this increase was due to a rise in the number of people using the fishery or to an increase in license fee? I would also like to know whether it is the intention of the fishery to become “self-sustaining” at any point as this could be achieved only either by massively increasing the licence fee, which would merely drive people out of business, or by increasing the number of licences, which, again, would drive people out of business and cause considerable environment problems. The lack of financial transparency

must be addressed. My constituents have repeatedly asked Natural Resources Wales questions about its spending and charges, but they feel that it has failed to answer them adequately. Apparently, NRW has indicated that a financial manager would address those points, but that has not been forthcoming so I therefore put these questions to the Minister.

According to my constituents, the fishery's financial records are not adequate and contain numerous omissions and expenses that do not seem credible to my constituents, such as £20,000 running costs for an amphibious vehicle that was supposedly used only for cockle survey work, which would have amounted to just a few days each year. What work was that vehicle carrying out?

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that all accounts from NRW and the Environment Agency on the Dee estuary and other cockle beds should be fully published and readily available? People should not have to make freedom of information requests so that we can all see exactly what is going on.

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point on behalf of Welsh and English cocklers. My constituents have raised pertinent questions, and they have every right to ask them and to be provided with answers if they feel that questions have not yet been responded to, or avoided altogether. They also ask for the necessary support from the Environment Agency, which again they feel has not been forthcoming.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): My south-Wales constituency has—or had—a great cockle industry in the Burry estuary. The constant complaint from cocklers at the moment is that although the estuary is badly managed by Natural Resources Wales, which is part of the Welsh Government, they still have to pay full licence fees. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is about time that the Welsh Government started taking a real interest in this issue?

Margaret Greenwood: As an English MP I am acting on behalf of my constituents and asking the Environment Agency, and the relevant Minister, to respond to my points, but I understand why the hon. Gentleman raises that issue.

The Minister recently campaigned for the UK to leave the EU, and he asked:

“Is it better to have control and the ability to decide? Or, is it better to exchange that control for a seat at a table where you may, sometimes have some influence? I believe there is a special value in having the ability to act, to decide and to get things done. Where we have control we can bring clarity and consistency.”

Having made that point, his Department is nevertheless happy to pass responsibility to another administration. That is fine, but there should be some scrutiny of that administration since we have a vested interest in its effectiveness. How can the Minister be confident that English cocklers are getting a good deal, or that the Environment Agency is looking after their interests? Who will be the arbiter if Natural Resources Wales goes ahead and pursues a policy that we as English MPs have no influence over, and how can our constituents feel adequately represented?

7.27 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) on securing this important debate. This issue has impacted on my constituents and those of many hon. Members here today for a number of years, and sadly it has highlighted the injustices that can be created when devolution fails to address the important question of cross-border accountability. My hon. Friend has already set out some of the history behind this matter, and the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2008 set the regulatory framework and was the product of many years' work. I believe that the intentions in that order have been allowed to erode over time and—critically for my constituents—there seems to be enormous difficulty in establishing direct accountability for decisions made under the auspices of that framework.

My hon. Friend has eloquently set out many of the problems faced by her constituents and mine as a result of the transfer of responsibility for the Dee estuary to Natural Resources Wales—problems that the Environment Agency has been aware of for some time, but is seemingly unwilling or unable to act on. It was therefore remarkable that in the latter part of 2015 the Environment Agency proposed a new regulatory order to reflect current management arrangements, and that Natural Resources Wales take over sole responsibility for the Dee. It seems from that proposal that there has been no acknowledgement of our constituents' genuine concerns about the way the arrangement is currently working. Furthermore, if a regulatory order is required, are current arrangements operating without lawful authority because they have not yet been the subject of such an order?

The issue of accountability has come to a head because of the implementation by Natural Resources Wales of what is known as the bird food model for determining quotas, which was imposed on the estuary without consultation. That represents a dramatic departure from previous systems, and has put the livelihoods of many fishermen in jeopardy. There appears to be no proper mechanism for my constituents to challenge this decision, which they regard as a substantial departure from the management plan agreed under the regulating order of 2008. It will not be possible in the time available tonight to dissect the issues that my constituents have with the model, save to say that they very much doubt that they will be able to earn a living under it, and that it is a model that is not being adopted anywhere else in England.

Given that this represents such a substantial departure from the previous practice, I have to ask whether the decision to proceed with this model has been authorised in accordance with the law. Paragraph 3 of the original regulating order gives the Environment Agency the right

“to impose restrictions on, and make regulations respecting, the dredging, fishing for or taking of cockles within the limits of the fishery.”

Hon. Members will note that the regulation refers to the Environment Agency, not Natural Resources Wales, hence my question about NRW's capacity to make these changes. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer these questions satisfactorily tonight.

I should make it clear that before we called for this debate our constituents had been trying to resolve these issues through various channels, as my hon. Friend has

[Justin Madders]

described. My constituents have also tried to address the issues through the parliamentary ombudsman in England, who said the following:

“Unfortunately, we cannot look at your complaint about the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs because your complaint relates to the management of the cockle beds on the River Dee Estuary which is the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales. As your complaint is about restrictions placed on cockle fishing on the River Dee by Natural Resources Wales we believe that the organisation responsible for responding to your complaint is Natural Resources Wales.”

So off we went to the ombudsman for Wales. What did he say? Well, he noted with characteristic understatement that the new bird food model had

“had an effect on your capability to maintain a sustainable income”.

He went on to say that he was not suggesting that the use of the bird food model had not had a major impact, and that while he felt that there could have been consultation on the new model used by Natural Resources Wales, he could not look into the actual methodology used. He made a recommendation that there should be consultation if the model were due to change again, but a consultation in the future will be no good if the fisherman have already gone out of business by that point. This is the nub of the issue. My constituents have had a system imposed on them without consultation. It is entirely unfit for purpose and it is destroying their livelihoods, yet there seems to be no legitimate route through which they can raise their concerns about it. Where is the accountability in this situation?

Various other issues raised with the Welsh ombudsman were not dealt with on the basis they were not part of his jurisdiction and would have to go back to the parliamentary ombudsman in England. We also raised questions about the running costs, and we were referred to the Wales Audit Office. I agree with the point that was made earlier: we should not have to chase around various organisations to get answers to these questions. The details and facts should be readily available for anyone to see. Does this not sum up the lack of clarity and accountability in the arrangements? Why should my constituents have to be passed from pillar to post trying to get answers when their livelihoods are on the line? My hon. Friend has asked a series of highly pertinent questions tonight on behalf of her constituents about the way in which the estuary is currently being managed. I, too, have asked questions to which I hope one person—the Minister—can provide satisfactory answers.

I have spoken in the past about the fact that the rigid lines of devolution do not reflect the reality on the ground in the north-west of England and north Wales. Our economy works as one, huge numbers of people live on one side of the border and work on the other and our transport links are hugely interconnected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson)—whose constituency can be seen across the River Dee—has many constituents who work in my area, and I have many who work in his. The Borderlands rail franchise, which runs through my constituency and into Wales, is up for renewal, and I hope that a way can be found to ensure that passengers from both sides of the border

have a voice in that process. But the problem we are discussing tonight is something else. It is happening now, and it is driving my constituents out of business. It is mired in myriad different bureaucracies, none of which seems to be accountable for its actions.

The Environment Agency might have outsourced the day-to-day running of the estuary, but it should not be able to outsource its responsibility to my constituents who have been let down by this abrogation. So I ask the Minister to look into the details, to find a management model that respects the environment but also crucially allows people to earn a living and, most of all, to devise a governance arrangement that does not hide behind national boundaries but instead allows my constituents to have a single transparent and accountable body that acknowledges the existence of legitimate interests on both sides of the border.

7.34 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) on securing this debate and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). Both have been heavily involved in trying to raise their constituents' concerns.

The cockle fishery within the Dee estuary is managed through the Dee Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2008, a regulating order giving exclusive rights to manage the fishery resource. In 2004, the Environment Agency made an application under the Sea Fisheries (Shellfish) Act 1967 to the Secretary of State and Welsh Ministers for a regulating order in respect of cockles in the Dee estuary to grant them a right of regulating a fishery for 20 years. As the fishery straddles the border between England and Wales, the application was progressed jointly by the Secretary of State and Welsh Ministers, and a single order was made for the designated area.

The 2008 order was created to enable the Environment Agency to carry into effect and enforce regulations and restrictions relating to the dredging of, fishing for and taking of cockles within a designated area of the Dee estuary. The order allowed the Environment Agency to manage and conserve the wild fishery by the use of licences to control the number of people who fish there and make regulations and levy tolls for the benefit of the fishery. Unlicensed persons are excluded from the regulated area except for individuals taking no more than 5 kg of cockles daily by hand for personal consumption. That is similar to how inshore fisheries and conservation authorities would manage cockle fisheries in their waters. For example, the North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority would manage its cockle beds via a byelaw, with permit holders fishing only during an open season based on the IFCA's stock assessments.

Natural Resources Wales took on the functions of the Environment Agency Wales in 2013, including the regulatory responsibility for the 2008 order. NRW currently acts on behalf of the Environment Agency to deliver their statutory functions for the English side of the 2008 order. While NRW and the Environment Agency are joint grantees of the 2008 order, NRW manages all

operational and management aspects of the order. That arrangement is enshrined in a service level agreement between NRW and the Environment Agency.

Before the 2008 order, the cockle fishery operated on a boom-and-bust cycle, with the beds often shut for a few years owing to very low cockle stocks. Once stocks had built up, the beds would open, but that would often result in hundreds of cocklers operating on the beds, resulting in stocks sometimes being cleared out quickly—within days or weeks—and consequently the beds being closed for several more years in some cases. From 1996, the beds were closed except for brief periods in 1997, the years 2001 through to 2003, and 2005. Since the introduction of the 2008 order, the beds have opened every year and have provided up to six months' lucrative employment for 53 licenced cocklers. Additionally, during a bumper year, the fishery could be opened to a number of short-term non-renewable licence holders issued on a points system, using the NRW stock assessment to estimate the total allowable catch.

NRW estimates that licensees can earn somewhere in the region of £20,000 to £40,000 during a six-month season, depending on variables such as the cost per kilo of cockles. In 2013, 545 tonnes of cockles were landed and the fishery was worth an estimated £650,000, and 2014 was a bumper year with approximately 1,500 tonnes landed, giving an estimated value of £1.5 million. The cockling season was shorter in 2015 with just 250 tonnes of cockles landed, giving a value of £500,000. The amount of cockles landed and their value therefore varies from year to year.

The cockle season usually opens in July for six months and is subject to harvest limits derived from stock assessments that take place between April and July. Carrying out those stock assessments is one of the key costs covered by the licence. In 2015, early concerns over stock levels meant that the fishery was not opened until 21 September, but NRW reduced its annual licence fee in recognition. This year, the Dee estuary cockle beds opened on 1 July.

Fifteen licence holders are located in England and the remaining 38 in Wales. Many of the English licence holders have expressed concerns about the management of the fishery, which resulted in a letter of complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales about NRW earlier this year. It does, however, make sense for a single body to be responsible for the management of the Dee cockle fishery. It is not practical for the estuary to be divided in half between English and Welsh authorities, as the England-Wales boundary runs through the middle of some of the beds and cockle stocks move around the estuary. That means that in some years the English beds are heavily stocked and Welsh beds have no stocks, and vice-versa. Performing surveys, liaising with cocklers and carrying out enforcement would all be more complicated and less efficient if two management bodies were involved.

Following the complaint about the NRW to the ombudsman regarding the management of the fishery, its resulting decision, given in May, was that the complaint should not be investigated. I do believe, however, that there must be a good level of quality consultation and dialogue between the NRW and those affected by its management decisions. I understand that there is a Dee Estuary Sea Fisheries Liaison Group, which meets regularly and includes both cocklers and the NRW. I am aware

that the most recent meetings of this group were held on 12 May and 17 June, and that an annual general meeting of licence holders was held on 23 June, with five attendees from interested parties. I am unaware of any contentious issues being raised at this AGM.

The hon. Member for Wirral West raised the issue of EA attendance. During the past year or so, the EA has increased its frequency of attendance at these meetings. Following today's debate, and the points she and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston both made, my officials will reconfirm to the agency my belief that it should attend all these meetings in future, in order to represent the views of their constituents. I also understand that they met the EA in January 2016, together with local licence holders. The licence holders were given contact details of EA staff who could assist should they have concerns, and the EA has said, when I made inquiries, that it has not received any concerns to date but it stands ready to assist should concerns be raised directly with it.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of licences and the transparency of licence fees, and I should point out that that was looked at by the ombudsman. To clarify the position, the 53 licensees pay an annual fee to the NRW, which is currently set at £1,500. In the previous three years, it had been set at £1,300, but it was reduced in 2015-16, in part owing to the season being shorter than usual. I am told that in 2015-16 the fishery cost the NRW more than £100,000 to regulate, with the cost primarily being made up of salary costs for liaison, surveys and enforcement. There are also some capital costs associated with equipment, hire of boats and so on. In 2015-16, the licence fee brought in £63,000, because of the reduction, and the EA therefore contributed the shortfall of £18,000—an additional £20,000 was made up in grants from NRW. So there is a shortfall, but there is transparency on the costs of the fishery.

The hon. Lady also asked how the licence fee is calculated, and I have been given a wonderful formula:

$$\frac{A \times B}{N}$$

A is the annual number of working days on survey, enforcement or administration, B is the staff cost per working day and N is the number of licences. So a transparent formula is used, and I have been given the figures that she requested. Secondly, she made a point about prosecutions for illegal cockling. Although that is a responsibility of the NRW and the Welsh Government, I can confirm that at the end of last year I had a conversation with Carl Sargeant, the then fisheries Minister in the Welsh Government. He discussed his concerns about enforcement on this fishery and checked whether I was happy for certain actions to be taken. So we do discuss these issues.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the changes that were made to the bird food model. I am told that two different approaches have been taken. Previously, the West model was used, under which some 4,500 tonnes of cockles had been set aside, particularly for oystercatchers, whereas under the new Stillman model, which was introduced, that figure went up to 6,900 tonnes. But there are also some advantages to that model, as the West model would not allow any exploitation of the fishery unless there were at least 100 cockles per square metre.

[George Eustice]

In conclusion, hon. Members have made some important points, and I hope I have been able to reassure them that we take this issue seriously. I have asked the EA to attend all future meetings, and I hope that this clarifies some of the points that they have requested.

Question put and agreed to.

7.45 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 19 July 2016

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Persecution of Religious Minorities: Middle East

9.30 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East and its effect on the UK.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I thank all hon. Members who have made the effort to come to Westminster Hall on such a lovely day. I am pleased to see the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), in her place and look forward to her contribution. I congratulate the Minister on his elevation to his new post and very much look forward to his response to the debate. When he held other ministerial posts, we held him in high esteem. We still do, and we look forward to hearing a comprehensive response, like those he has given us previously in reply to other matters.

The persecution of religious minorities in the middle east and its effect on the UK is a massive issue. It is one that we are greatly concerned about and one that we want to debate fully. I speak as chair of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, in the knowledge that this human right—a right for all—is key to stability in the middle east. I shall talk about that freedom in the middle east and the effect on the UK. I make this speech very much on behalf of my Christian brothers and sisters who live in the middle east. They have been persecuted over many years and their numbers have been greatly reduced. Other Members present will be aware of that and may wish to address it in their contributions.

While we watch, and are deeply saddened by, the recent horrific terrorist attacks that have rocked the world—in Nice, Dhaka, Medina, Baghdad and Istanbul, among other places—we must continue to bear in mind those throughout the middle east whose lives have been radically changed forever. We think especially of people in Syria and Iraq. In Syria, 1 million Christians have been displaced and dispersed all over the world. Just on Sunday past, I was talking to a gentleman from Canada who told me that Canada has taken in 30,000 Syrians, many of them Christians. Other countries around the world have also taken in Syrians. Many of those 30,000 will never return home; they will be settled in Canada and wish never to go back to their home country.

We are very aware of the situation in Iraq, which is one of those countries in which Christians are a small minority. Where do they feature in an Iraq where Christians are attacked or murdered and their churches destroyed? They are under a lot of pressure when it comes to education and employment. The Iraq displacement tracking matrix found that, between January 2014 and 22 June

2016, there were more than 3.3 million internally displaced individuals—more than 550,000 families—dispersed across 100 districts in Iraq. Such has been the impact of the persecution of Christians and religious minorities in the middle east. I shall also discuss other religious minorities, because so many people are displaced and/or under pressure.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on an issue that is so very important, not only to us parliamentarians and the wider community, but to Christian communities in the middle east. Does he agree that we would like the Minister to say in his response that the Government will utilise all their diplomatic and trade links to protect religious minorities from persecution?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and for pre-empting a later part of my speech. When we give aid to countries around the world, we need to ensure that it goes fairly to all people in those countries. We have previously debated spending by the Department for International Development, and I want to make it clear that we support that spending and the commitment to spending 0.7% of GNI on foreign aid.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. He has raised the very important point that we need to adhere to that 0.7% commitment. Does he hope that the Government will continue to adhere to that principle?

Jim Shannon: In a previous debate, the Government committed to that 0.7% spend. We see a lot of good coming off the back of that, so why should we not do it?

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Alongside the aid that will go to the countries and whatever trade agreement is established, there needs to be an agreement on the persecution of Christians, and if that is breached or infringed, there needs to be a proper investigation and those found guilty need to be held to account.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. friend for those salient words. It is important to make sure that any trade or assistance given through DFID or by other means is subject to accountability. It is good to have that on the record.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate, which I know many of my constituents are following closely. Does he agree that the UK can use its authority to ensure that there is respect for human rights and for political and civil rights in Syria, Iraq and the wider middle east? We must ensure that enforcement of the international covenant on civil and political rights is seen as a fundamental that we expect to be upheld in countries to which we are offering aid and support.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for those wise words. That is exactly what this debate is about: the opportunity to consider human rights in the countries to which she referred and throughout the middle east. We will mention some others in the course of the debate.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way—he is being most generous—and congratulate him warmly on securing this important debate. Does he agree that we need to know the extent of the problem in terms of people coming to the UK? Is he aware that the Home Office does not compile statistics on claims for asylum on the basis of religious persecution? Does he agree that we should perhaps consider doing so?

Jim Shannon: I shall address that issue later in my speech. The all-party group of which I am chair recently published a report called “Fleeing Persecution: Asylum Claims in the UK on Religious Freedom Grounds”, which contains lots of information. In it, we make 10 salient points that we feel are important. We will hold a meeting with the new Minister to discuss these matters and ensure that those points are taken on board. I am sure that other hon. Members will speak to them later in the debate as well.

Weak governance in Syria and Iraq has left societies in which violent terrorist groups wreak havoc and implement their own rule of law and punishments, in blatant violation of international human rights standards and law. Although it is not a legally binding statement, last month the UN commission of inquiry on Syria determined that Daesh is committing genocide against Yazidis. The commission also found that Daesh’s abuse of Yazidis—a small ethnically Kurdish religious community—amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I am sure he would agree that Daesh’s archaic interpretation of sharia law permits the enslavement of non-Muslim women and children. Such enslavement has been suffered by Yazidi people, as well as others. Treating people as the spoils of war is a war crime. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in calling on the Minister to ensure that the UK plays its part in making sure that evidence is available so that the International Criminal Court can bring rapists and enslavers to justice?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady feels, as we all do, very passionately about the Yazidis and the terrible crimes, brutality and violence that have been carried out among them. We will have the opportunity to speak about that; I intend to discuss it later in my speech.

We had a number of meetings, and the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) and, I think, some other Members were present. One could not fail to be moved by the stories that were heard—they were heart-wrenching and would have made a grown man cry. Many of us did shed tears for those who are under threat, face discrimination or, indeed, fight for their lives.

But it is not just the Yazidis who are suffering, it is the ancient religious communities, including the Syriac Catholics, the Mandaeans, the Baha’is, the Shi’as and Sunnis alike, the few remaining Jews in the area, the Protestants and the non-religious individuals as well. All their sacred sites are in danger of being wiped out. Less than a third of the 1.5 million Christians who were in Iraq in 2003 now remain. Looking at Iraq, the numbers have decreased dramatically—they are down to something like 250,000. And what about the destruction

of all those ancient monuments and sites, and the destruction and burning of the ancient books that hold centuries of information? They destroy them all with a blatant disregard for how important they are.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. He talks about the destruction of the heritage. His motion is, of course, about the impact here in the UK, so does he agree that as well as fighting the discrimination and standing up for the minorities we—our heritage organisations, our museums and so on—have a responsibility to find ways of preserving the heritage and the areas that have been destroyed, and of commemorating that here in the UK?

Jim Shannon: That is absolutely right. In fairness, the Government have made some movement towards doing that. The Minister might be able to respond on that point. I think there are steps afoot to ensure that some of the monuments can be restored and some money sent that way to make it happen.

I would like to put on the record thanks to many organisations—I hope I do not leave any of them out. They are the churches from my area that support the middle east physically, practically and prayerfully, Release International, which does great work with Christians, Open Doors, which works in Christian solidarity worldwide, the Barnabas Fund, and the Elim charities that work on behalf of Christians across the whole middle east.

I mentioned other ethnic minority groups. The Baha’is in Iraq and Iran are subjected to unbelievable discrimination and hatred by those in positions of power. Let us look across the cauldron of the middle east and think of all the countries that are there. Indeed, eight of the 12 worst countries for persecution of Christians listed in a report by Open Doors are in the middle east. That is a list that no one wants to be in, because those are the places where persecution is more rife, rampant and deliberate. The right to freedom of religion or belief is a fundamental human right that nearly all the countries across the middle east have ratified and have made a commitment to uphold, but the reality is very different, with lots of lip service being paid.

When one group of individuals is discriminated against or persecuted on the basis of its religion or belief, that often signals conditions in which all but the deemed orthodox are oppressed and persecuted for their beliefs by the Government and/or non-state actors. Clearly, we must focus on those countries in the middle east that have ratified the fundamental human rights—referred to by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green)—but where we do not see much evidence of that ratification. Let us have evidence from those countries that have committed themselves to human rights freedoms—unfortunately, they do not always follow through.

Plurality of religion and belief is a crucial ingredient for a stable society, and the Foreign Office recognises that in its pledges for UN Human Rights Council membership from 2017 and in its current human rights structure, where the freedom of religion or belief team is housed under the human rights for a stable world stream. Last year the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief participated in a conference in New York, which almost 100 delegates from some

65 countries across the world attended. That was an opportunity for all those people to come together. In this House we come together as groups, and we encouraged similar groups from other countries across the world to come together, including from Canada, the United States, south America, Africa, the middle east, the far east and some of the eastern countries of Europe.

In countries where freedom of religion or belief is systematically violated, societal tension and violence frequently follow, leading to a more polarised society, with individuals retreating into their dogmas. Let us focus, again, on the group of which I am chair. The group had the chance to carry out an inquiry and produce a booklet on Pakistan and on how freedom of religious belief is looked upon there. The more we look at Pakistan, the more we feel for our Christian brothers and sisters and for other ethnic and religious minorities there. I know that the Minister has read the report, and I appreciate the time he has taken to do so in preparation for the debate. From a job and an education point of view, those who adhere to a religion outside the norm are the lowest of all the castes there are in Pakistan. The booklet, which we produced just last year, is another indication of why we need to look more deeply at Pakistan, Iran and Iraq.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is obviously right to focus on the middle east—indeed, he is talking about Pakistan and Iran. Is it also worth remembering, however, that a significant number of religious minorities who come to Europe—to this country—continue some of those battles here on home soil, and that we also need to keep an eye on that? I was struck by something that happened when I was in a school classroom in Marylebone five or six years ago. I was already being told that Shi'a and Sunni Muslim schoolchildren were ganging up against each other in the playground. We have to recognise that a lot of the problems may be transported closer to home.

Jim Shannon: The right hon. Gentleman brings a salient point into the debate. Yes, we need to be aware of that. We need to be aware of integration into society and of how we can do it well. We also need to be aware of the problems that come off the back of that.

When working with partners in the middle east, it is crucial that we discuss means for individuals to be free within their own nation's context to manifest their religion or belief and that we build and implement action plans for each context. Although traditionally less of a focus in political and diplomatic discussion, long-term strategies that integrate lessons from the past must be encouraged and supported in Iraq and Syria and across the whole region. I look forward to the Minister's response on that. To truly secure human rights and restore long-term peace, not just emergency responses but a long game and a considered perspective are necessary.

As chair of the all-party group on international freedom of religion or belief, I encourage DFID—the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) referred to this as well—to be sensitive to the complexities that religion brings, particularly to political action, which in many cases is contradictory to international law, that people use religion to justify. Even in the recent Turkish coup, we saw turmoil used as an opportunity to target and

attack churches in Trabzon and Malatya. Using that and countless other incidents across the middle east to dismiss religion as too tricky and to determine that it is the main cause of violence and wrongdoing is simplistic. The underlying political motives must be recognised and tackled.

Let us just look at the coup in Turkey. The coup is over, but many, looking from the outside in, will say, “Is this a chance to suppress human rights in Turkey?” Many of us feel that it could well be a chance to clamp down on all opposition. Is that what we want? Is it what should be happening? No, it is not. Is Turkey a safe place for religious groups at this moment in time? The evidence says that it is not.

Julian Knight: Will the hon. Gentleman also reflect on the fact that Turkey's Government used to be very secular and that there are now many disturbing indications that religion is being used as a battering ram to bring about intolerance within society to help the political elites?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We all would concur with what he said, and we thank him for his intervention and for reminding us.

It is good sometimes to look where the story is beyond the headline stories and the media. The real story of Turkey is suppression, the denial of human rights and deliberate discrimination against other ethnic and religious groups. We have to look beyond the 6,000 people who have been arrested and the coup that failed because people did not want it and turn our attention to what will happen off the back of it.

The Department for International Development already works with faith communities to eradicate poverty, but I urge it to ensure that, where aid is provided or contracts are awarded overseas, those things are channelled to civil society organisations and Government programmes that can demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of freedom of religion or belief and how their work will have a positive rather than a negative impact. That will not only help DFID's November 2015 strategic objective to strengthen global peace, security and governance but will help achieve sustainable development goal 16, which is to secure peace, security and global justice.

The all-party group for international freedom of religion or belief this year brought out another document entitled “Fleeing Persecution: Asylum Claims in the UK on Religious Freedom Grounds”, which I intend to speak about, because the motion we are debating is about the

“persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East and its effect on the UK”.

We need to look at how can we help influence what is happening in the middle east and best ensure that those coming here also have the opportunity to have their freedom.

Kate Green: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Home Office's approach to applications for asylum from some of these persecuted minorities is crass and clumsy? There is a need for much greater training of Home Office staff so that simplistic approaches to assessing whether people have suffered religious persecution are abandoned and so that we have a much subtler

[Kate Green]

understanding of the trauma and why people might find it difficult when they apply to express what happened to them.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is very much tuned into the report, because it says that. Before the debate started, I spoke to the Minister and made him aware of the 10 points that we asked to be considered. I do not want to trivialise the work that the Home Office does on asylum seekers, but some of the questions are almost a Bible trivia quiz. People are asked, “Can you tell us the books of the New Testament?” or, “Can you tell us the names of the 12 apostles?” Let us be honest: some of us in this room might be challenged to do that.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I am not going to give you the names of all 12 apostles, Mr Stringer. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. What he is saying reminded me of “The West Wing” episode “Shibboleth”, in which persecuted minorities wanted to go to the United States from China, and President Bartlet brought one of them in and challenged them, and they got the question right. That ignores the fact that there is also cultural persecution, not because of someone’s personal and strong faith but because they are identified with a greater collective community. The questions are completely erroneous and do not touch the heart of the persecution that people suffer for their family or community connections or the fear that they have.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for focusing on that issue.

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill): May I just allay some of the fears? I asked some questions, and in assessing claims based on religious persecution, caseworkers are expected to ask appropriate and sensitive questions based on an understanding of religious concepts and forms of religious persecution. Where the credibility of a conversion to a particular faith needs to be established, an interview is far more an exploration of a claimant’s personal experiences and journey to their new faith in their country and the UK than it is a test of religious facts, such as, “Name the ten commandments.” Those are not the sorts of questions we are asking.

Jim Shannon: If things have changed, that is good, but the evidence so far indicates that perhaps they have not. I am being respectful. We have asked for a meeting about this issue, and I hope we will have it with the appropriate Minister. I think that is the Minister who is here today, now he is in place. We look forward to having the opportunity to develop the 10 points we raised with our inquiry. They indicate that some things need to be put right.

Mark Field: We all have a great passion for the idea that there is terrible religious persecution across the world, but it is legitimate for any immigration authority, which is the Home Office here, to recognise that a minority of people—a small minority, but none the less a minority—will try to use persecution as a means of

getting in when that is not justified. To have a process in place is entirely legitimate from a Home Office point of view.

Jim Shannon: The right hon. Gentleman is right that there needs to be a process. We are not saying that there should not be a process; we are saying that it needs to be effective and to take into account the trauma of those who have been persecuted. It needs to reflect an understanding of the circumstances and why they are here. It is about how we do that in a compassionate way that gets the answers to the necessary questions and enables that person, whoever they may be, to apply for asylum and be granted it.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that the fact that these questions are being asked is a clear indication that the person asking the questions does not understand the essence of what it is to be a Christian, a Muslim or a Jew? None of those things are about memorising facts. Is it not the case that his all-party group’s inquiry also found evidence that sometimes the person asking the questions had to google the answers half an hour before the interview took place?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has given some examples that he is aware of, and I thank him for that.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way once again. This debate and this issue in particular raise article 9 of the Human Rights Act. In that regard, does he agree that the championing and protection of human rights in the UK are vital if we are to protect those same values in other countries, particularly in the middle east?

Jim Shannon: All the hon. Lady’s interventions have been applicable to the issues, and I thank her for that. It gives us a focus. I am conscious of time, Mr Stringer, so I will try to head on.

Despite the systematic persecution of religious or belief groups in Iraq—some expert bodies think that the situation with the Yazidis amounts to genocide; I think that, too, as do many others in the House—the UK’s Gateway, Children at Risk and Mandate resettlement schemes have helped only a few hundred in the past year or so. While some Iraqis may fit all the criteria under the current Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, they are not eligible for asylum in the UK because they are not Syrian nationals.

The all-party group that I chair is urgently calling for a modest expansion of the Syrian scheme to create an Iraqi vulnerable persons resettlement scheme. That would permit Iraqis who fit the current vulnerability criteria and are recommended by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to be made eligible for asylum in the UK. That would be a small change and a small number, but it would be a significant move that would enable those subject to persecution to have an opportunity. In the wake of the Chilcot report, the UK cannot absolve itself from assisting Iraqis. Prioritising Iraqis alongside Syrians for resettlement in the UK is the least we can do. Daesh does not discriminate depending on whether individuals are Iraqi or Syrian, and neither should we.

Finally, the all-party group's latest report, "Fleeing Persecution: Asylum Claims in the UK on Religious Freedom Grounds", which I referred to a few moments ago, highlights what happens when individuals who have been persecuted for their religion or belief reach the UK and claim asylum, and the lack of understanding and misperceptions of religion and belief among decision makers working in the UK asylum system. We are trying to be constructive. We are not pointing the finger or trying to be nasty. We want to point out where constructive changes could be made to help the system and those people who have every cause to be here and can no longer live in their own country. In religious persecution cases, Home Office caseworkers have often based their decision on whether an asylum seeker is genuine on quick internet searches, as the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) said, on informal staff-made crib sheets and, in the case of Christians, on Bible trivia questions including, "What colour is the Bible?" It could be black, white or red. Does it matter what colour it is, for goodness' sake? What is in the Bible is what matters. The word that it contains is the important issue. I sometimes wonder how these things happen. Such methods limit the capacity to differentiate between individuals who are genuinely part of a religious community facing persecution and those who have learnt the "correct" answers, as has already been referred to. Misinterpretation also plays a large role in the errors occurring in such cases. I urge the Home Office to recognise its genuine shortcomings and equip itself with well-trained staff and suitable translators to ensure a fair hearing of all cases.

I hope that the Minister agrees with the importance of addressing persecution in the middle east in both short and long-term strategies so that we in this House can, in conjunction with our partners abroad, secure the most stable world possible.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I intend to call the Front-Bench people to sum up at 10.30. There are three people standing; the arithmetic is straightforward.

10 am

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing this debate, and for his faithfulness in highlighting the issue in this place over some years.

The most recent report from Aid to the Church in Need, "Persecuted and Forgotten?", which analyses persecution in 22 countries, notes a serious deterioration since its previous report in 2013 of a deepening cycle of persecution. It states:

"The vast exodus of Christians from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East highlights the very real possibility that Christianity could soon all but disappear from much of its ancient homeland." It states that the cause is in large part "the product of an ethnic cleansing motivated by religious hatred."

The actions of Daesh, which have acted tragically to instil a fear of genocide, do not just impact on Christians, as we know, but have affected many other groups: Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, Mandaeans, Yazidis, Baha'is, Kurds and others. What should be our response to the suffering of those people? I want to briefly address three points.

First, we should speak out. Holding a debate such as this is valuable because it tells our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faiths that they are not

forgotten. But we need to do more. Secondly, we need to work together with others, particularly internationally, for the religious freedom of those who suffer persecution. Thirdly, we need to work for justice and ensure that the actions of the perpetrators are stopped and that they are brought to justice. I want to speak briefly about those three issues.

First, on speaking out, here in Westminster Hall at the end of June we held the national prayer breakfast, which 740 community leaders from all over the country attended. The theme was the Church in the middle east and the aim was to highlight the concerns about persecution there. It was notable that 150 parliamentarians attended, the most of any national prayer breakfast. That highlights the concern that colleagues in this place have about this issue.

The keynote speaker was Bishop Angaelos, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the UK. He spoke powerfully about the importance of the role that we all have to play in speaking out honestly and graciously to express our concerns. He called for us to work together. He said:

"Christians in the Middle East are indigenous people and reject minority status. They see themselves as intrinsic members, and indigenous peoples...We need to address the reality of this situation...there has been a systemic, yet gradual prejudice, marginalisation and alienation of Christians and minorities allowed to continue over decades. This does not have to continue on our watch...We must realise that the current situation is greater than us all; it needs us all to work together...There can no longer be a concept of 'over there' because families of those affected in the Middle East are members of your constituencies, our Churches, and our society as a whole...We are one very large community...our paths cross, our experience is one and our journey is one that we must share. Regardless of which House one sits in, which Church one worships in, or...which faith one does or does not have, we must work together for the freedom and dignity of human life and speak with a collaborative voice."

He particularly emphasised the oneness of the human family and how there is no more space for a "Muslim East" and a "Christian West". He emphasised how we are now all members of a global community; our world is now intertwined. What happens in each part affects all the others and we must promote human dignity, equality and respect.

The speech was powerful; many in the room were deeply moved and looked to how they could take forward their responsibility in this respect. I shall now briefly touch on how the UK could work with others.

The United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, said:

"Daesh is responsible for genocide against groups in areas under its control, including Yazidis, Christians, and Shia Muslims."

He has focused on the need for global attention to deal with the plight of religious minorities, particularly in Iraq and Syria. He has challenged the world to "find the resources to help those harmed by these atrocities."

Knox Thames, who has been appointed by him, has within the past few days put out a call, together with the ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom in the US, David Saperstein, and they are convening a conference on 29 July at the State Department in the US, entitled "Threats to religious and ethnic minorities under Daesh". The purpose of the meeting will be to advance intergovernmental efforts to protect religious minorities in Iraq and Syria and to discuss with the international community what additional actions can

[*Fiona Bruce*]

be taken to help ensure a future for religious diversity. More than 20 countries will be represented, many at ambassadorial or head of department level.

Liz Saville Roberts: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way because I want to raise a point that I fear may not otherwise come up. I am sure she shares my concern that encrypted messaging services such as WhatsApp and Telegram are being used to sell Yazidi and other non-Muslim women as sex slaves alongside weapons and pets. One message shared with a Daesh group carried the description:

“Virgin. Beautiful. 12 years old...Her price has reached \$12,500 and she will be sold soon.”

This is an area where every step must be taken not just to hasten the rescue of these women, but to ensure that the global digital platforms that are being used to carry out these atrocities are held to account and that this is prevented. There is a global role in this.

Fiona Bruce: The hon. Lady makes a very pertinent point. The Yazidis have suffered particularly in this respect. The younger the girl, tragically, the more valuable the price extorted.

Will Her Majesty’s Government be participating in the conference organised by the US State Department on 29 July? Will the Minister ensure that we are indeed represented and that a report is brought back?

On ensuring that we work for justice for those who are oppressed, I will refer back to the debate on 20 April that has already been mentioned today. In that debate on the actions of Daesh as genocide, I called on the Government to make an immediate referral to the UN Security Council with a view to conferring jurisdiction upon the International Criminal Court so that the perpetrators could be brought to justice. Time inhibits my referring to everything mentioned in that debate, but we heard that girls as young as eight were raped; that a two-year-old boy had been killed and his body parts ground down and fed to his mother; and that mothers were seeing their own children crucified. No one could deny that these atrocities are genocide. Executions, mass graves, assassination of church leaders, crucifixions, systematic rapes, torture of men, women and children, beheadings—there are so many acts of violence that the evil seems fictional and medieval. Yet, despite the vote that day in the House of Commons—279 to nil in favour of the motion calling on the Government to refer Daesh’s genocidal atrocities to the UN Security Council—still no referral has been made.

The new Foreign Secretary, in an article in *The Daily Telegraph* on 27 March 2016, said that Daesh

“are engaged in what can only be called genocide of the poor Yazidis (though for some baffling reason the Foreign Office still hesitates to use the term genocide).”

The debate called on the Government to ensure that the unanimous will of Parliament was implemented. It was not. Now that we have a Foreign Secretary who has made such a clear statement of his view that Daesh’s actions against the persecuted constitute genocide, will the Government register the referral that has been requested by a unanimous vote of Parliament, with the UN Security Council, so that action in the international community can be accelerated to bring the perpetrators

to justice? We know that recognition of genocide brings with it obligations on the part of the international community to prevent, punish and protect.

Finally, I ask all colleagues in the House to sign early-day motion 346 on the recognition of genocide by Daesh, which I placed in the Table Office yesterday. It expresses profound concern that our Government have still not called upon the UN Security Council to take such action.

10.12 am

Mr Gavin Shaker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I am extremely grateful to be called in this very important debate. I commend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for bringing it forward and for the leadership that he displays on this issue, alongside many others in the House. The salience of this issue means that it has been spoken about many times both in the Chamber and in this place, and the story of recent years is a tragic one. It reflects the importance of the issue against the historical backdrop.

I welcome the Minister to his new role. He has always been a good and decent Minister in any Department, so we welcome his leadership at the Home Office.

The middle east has suffered at the hands of sectarian and religious-based conflict for centuries. Sadly, religious persecution remains a prevalent issue across the region. Minorities have suffered from sectarian strife, with whole communities being destroyed in Iraq. Up to half of Christians have fled, many to Syria, where today they face new threats. The situation greatly deteriorated last year with the escalation in the conflict and the rise of Daesh.

Daesh has been one of the most lethal organisations in the history of the middle east and is engaged in the persecution of anyone who does not espouse its medieval, corrupt and extreme Islamist theology. It has particularly targeted minority religious and ethnic communities, including the Christian, Yazidi, Shi’a, Turkmen and Shabak communities, who are especially vulnerable. Daesh has threatened the whole region, but Iraq’s stability has been at particular risk from this abhorrent organisation.

Human rights and religious freedoms have been threatened—Daesh’s violent religious and political ideology allows no space for religious diversity or freedom of thought or expression. As the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) mentioned, the group has deliberately expelled minority communities from their historic homelands, forced them to convert to its version of Islam, raped and enslaved women and children, and tortured and killed community members. It has deliberately targeted Iraq’s smallest religious minority communities. That could well mark the end of the ancient religious pluralism displayed by communities in northern Iraq.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, this scourge has contributed to more than 3.3 million internally displaced people within Iraq alone, who have fled their homes since January 2014, in addition to the more than 1 million people who remain displaced since the sectarian conflicts of the mid-2000s. There are 230,000 Iraqi refugees in countries across the region. It is important to note that these are only the Iraqis registered by the UNHCR in camps in Egypt, Gulf Co-operation Council countries, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. As the International Development

Committee recently noted, many refugees, particularly Christians, avoid refugee camps out of fear of persecution, and so, many vulnerable people may not even be considered for resettlement—as refugees in host communities are less visible to relevant authorities. We, as an international community, need more creative solutions to assist those people, although that is not to say that those in refugee camps are not also vulnerable and in need of refuge. In this country, our response should include a modest extension of our current Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme.

The House recently unanimously voted to describe what is being done to Yazidis, Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as

“genocide at the hands of Daesh”.

Estimates put the number of Yazidis in Iraq at between 500,000 and 700,000, with the vast majority concentrated in northern Iraq, in and around Sinjar. In Syria, the number of Yazidis is estimated to be a tenth of that. Despite the fact that the majority of Yazidis in the region are overwhelmingly Iraqi, they are not eligible for the VPRS, simply because they do not live in Syria.

In 2015, 102 Iraqi refugees were resettled under the Gateway protection programme and four under the Mandate scheme and 216 grants of asylum or other forms of protection, at initial decision, were given to Iraqi nationals. In contrast, official statistics show that, by the end of March 2016, nearly 1,900 Syrians had been resettled under the VPRS in the UK, including 1,602 who arrived since October 2015. The current levels of resettlement in the UK provide persecuted Iraqi minorities considerably lower levels of protection than Syrians. That is a simple fact, and it is particularly disconcerting given that Syrian and Iraqi minorities have both suffered from Daesh. The former can qualify as part of the 20,000 that the previous Prime Minister spoke of. To be consistent and fair as a country, as we should be in the world community, the VPRS should be extended to include Iraqi minorities suffering from Daesh.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): On that point, and the hon. Gentleman’s previous point that many people of a particular religious persuasion are not going to the camps because they feel at risk, does he recognise that that is particularly true of women and girls, because of the threat that they face? Does he also recognise that the German Government have been much more responsive in respect of Yazidis and other Iraqis, not only offering them refugee access but making sure that they have pathways to counselling and therapy?

Mr Shuker: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The particular vulnerability suffered by women and girls is visible inside and outside the camps. They also need safe passage to areas where they may gain asylum. Some scary numbers—for example, the number of young women travelling into Europe and disappearing, many of whom will inevitably be forced to trade their own bodies to enable their survival—should make us especially concerned about that group.

On the Iraqi minorities and the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, we should consider that the previous Prime Minister himself drew no distinction between either side of the “line in the sand” between Iraq and Syria. Indeed, this Parliament determined, in its decision on air strikes in Syria, that if Daesh were not respecting

that line in the sand, neither should we in our counter-extremism tactics. We need to respond to that inconsistency in the existing VPRS.

Whatever people’s view of the decision in 2003—personally, I was opposed to the war in Iraq at the time—we have a continuing responsibility to the sovereign state of Iraq. The UK should not absolve itself of responsibility, especially given the recent Chilcot finding that the UK decision to embark on the programme of de-Ba’athification and the demobilisation of the Iraqi army exacerbated sectarian divisions, contributing to many of the problems in Iraq today. Making Iraqis eligible for resettlement through a modest extension of the VPRS is an appropriate and modest response, and entirely consistent with the decent man that I know the Minister to be.

10.21 am

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing the debate.

Religion causes all wars. We have heard that, have we not? A throwaway comment at a dinner table, or something overheard in a conversation? It is historical nonsense. It is a calumny of the highest order. Economics and doctrine, and their perversion, have been the root of most wars in the past 100 years, in our experience. The second world war was not caused by religion. In the first world war, religion had a marginal impact, perhaps in the tertiary areas of the conflict zone. In the 16th century, even the French wars of religion did not have all that much to do with religion.

The reality is that religion, which is about hope and about people trying to find a path through life and a way, with their loved ones, to a truth that they can believe in, is being used for the darkest of all possible purposes. It is, in effect, being perverted in the most extreme circumstances. It is being used to hang other issues on.

What we are experiencing in the world, however, is perhaps also a result of the 24-hour news culture, with this thing in our faces all the time, making us much more aware of the daily tragedies going on in the world. Furthermore, persecution on religious grounds seems to be more acute now than at any time in living memory, perhaps going back even beyond the Armenian genocide at the time of the first world war. Religion has become the basis for, or a means of bringing about, conflict, replacing conventional war, which has been put aside.

Given the changing nature of conflict, it is important for us as a sovereign, democratic and just society to stand up and say when we believe that something is terribly wrong. Therefore, what has happened to the Yazidi people in Iraq and beyond, and the Christians, is genocide. That is clear, and we absolutely should be saying so as a nation.

What do we do, apart from using that word and calling something genocide, rightly to force a programme on those who are indulging in such abominable acts? When Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary, we had an “ethical foreign policy”, which seemed to have a hint of post-imperial angst about it. To me, an ethical foreign policy should be one in which we link our aid and

[*Julian Knight*]

economic engagement to how countries treat their minorities. Surely a litmus test for any society is how it treats its minorities.

If intolerance reigns in a society, frankly, there will be little rule of law, or contract law, and little good governance. From a corporate viewpoint alone, that is a bad investment; from a moral viewpoint, it is also a bad investment. We should therefore think carefully about how we position our international aid budget, which I am glad to see that we have kept at 0.7%. I want to see us use it in future to target countries that show they will protect the rights of minorities in their societies.

Fiona Bruce: My hon. Friend is making a powerful point. He is absolutely right that we should be looking at religious persecution as a cause of poverty, displacement and many other degrees of suffering. Does he agree that if DFID did so, and looked more carefully at it as such a cause, we could prevent, down the line, a great deal of not only suffering, but humanitarian aid expenditure by the international community?

Julian Knight: My hon. Friend makes a good point, which returns to what I was saying about how the countries that indulge in such activities are actually bad investments. In effect, they are proving themselves to be unworthy of the aid that we are giving them. We need to be thoughtful about exactly how economically engaged we are with those countries.

In Turkey, we have seen increasing intolerance. Under Atatürk, the formation of modern Turkey was about a secular society—religion still played an enormous part in society, but the governance of Turkey was secular. It is now moving away from that and, too, hanging on to religion some of the darker elements in that society. We have to be very aware of that in an important neighbour on our doorstep. In 1999 or 2000, I think, when we were looking at the crisis in the Balkans, we were saying, “Isn’t it horrific that this goes on on Europe’s borders?” but Turkey is on Europe’s borders as well. We should be thinking about that in connection with our sphere of influence.

To conclude, we need to consider the APPG report. When we deal with individuals—after all, this is about individuals—we have to be much more thoughtful and better trained in how we do so. The better statistics help, so that we know the reasons why people are coming to this country—are they fleeing religious persecution?—as does better training for Home Office and UK Border Force personnel, in particular to assess whether an asylum seeker is a victim of religious persecution.

I imagine that it can be difficult for people to speak up, especially if they are members of a minority and have had to hide their religious light under a bushel. When they come to another country, the person they are seeing is not only in a uniform—perhaps not the reassuring figure that we might see, but a threat and authority—but someone from whom they would have kept things quiet, and now they are having to open up, often in a foreign language, and in a completely alien environment. I understand how people might find that incredibly difficult and their silence might be perceived as something different. We need to spend time with such

individuals, and we need to support our staff to do so, in order to help all such people not only in our country, but in the camps, close to the conflict zones.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Before I call Peter Grant, I assume that the proposer would like two minutes at the end of the Minister’s speech.

Jim Shannon *indicated assent.*

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I call Peter Grant.

10.29 am

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Thank you very much, Mr Stringer. I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate. Not for the first time, particularly in Westminster Hall debates, I am struck by the agreement and unanimity around the Chamber. I think that we have heard speeches or interventions from Members of six different parties—apologies if there have been more and I have missed any.

We are agreed that the world is facing genocide. That should strike at the hearts of us all. It does not matter whether it is happening on the borders of Europe, the borders of Asia or the borders of London; when our fellow human beings are being persecuted as mercilessly and brutally as the Yazidis, Christians and other minorities are, we should all feel the pain and we should all resolve to give them whatever help we can and not to allow the climate in other parts of the world to continue to evolve so such persecution happens again. Earlier this year, as we always do in January, we commemorated the holocaust with the words, “Never again,” but what are we doing to prevent the climate of hate, fear and ignorance that allows holocausts and genocide to be perpetrated again and again from being allowed to develop in the first place?

I commend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) not only for securing the debate but for the work that he and others have done to remind us that persecution, which in fact used to be described as martyrdom, is happening in several parts of the world. We are talking today primarily about the middle east, but the majority of cases in which it is established that Christians were murdered because of their faith are actually happening in parts of Africa. However bad persecution in the middle east is in numerical terms, there are other parts of the world in which it is as bad or worse.

I think that history will show that what Daesh is doing is on a par with what the Nazis did in occupied Europe. The numbers may not get quite as horrifically high, but I think that Daesh’s brutality and dehumanisation of human beings will be proven to be every bit as horrific and evil. That is why the United Kingdom Government and other Governments should not hesitate to say, “This is a genocide, it will be treated as a genocide, and the perpetrators will be pursued to the ends of the earth and brought to justice”—not by a court that owes its legitimacy or sovereignty to an individual nation state but by the court of the world: the International Criminal Court. These are crimes against humanity, and it is both the right and the responsibility of all humanity to ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice.

As was mentioned earlier, where a climate of persecution is allowed to arise, religion is often used as an excuse, and it always has been. The massive upheaval that these nations saw in the 17th and 18th centuries was supposedly about religion, but it was not. It was about different tribes—essentially, different dynasties or political parties—fighting over power, but it was always presented as a war about which kind of Christian should sit on the throne. That is not a new phenomenon.

I do not know of any major world religion that instructs or even permits its followers to kill innocent human beings simply for being different, and if anyone can contradict me, I would be interested to know. I am a Christian, and there is nothing in the Christian faith that allows anyone to commit the crime of murder against an innocent person. If anything, Islam is even clearer: the taking of innocent life is not permitted under any circumstances. As well as being crimes against humanity, the atrocities that Daesh is committing are among the worst crimes that can be committed against the Islamic faith.

Patrick Grady: Just about all the religions that have been mentioned have in their scripture or teaching the golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto yourself.” That is not trite; it should be fundamental to the way we all live our lives. Perhaps if that rule were respected a bit more, there would be less need for such debates.

Peter Grant: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. It is important that as part of the healing process, victims are helped to understand that the people who persecuted them—those who raped them or murdered their families—were not acting in the name of Islam, Christianity or any other faith. If they were acting in the name of any ideology at all, it was the ideology of Satanism—the ideology of pure evil. For victims to understand that helps the healing process, and it also helps in the very difficult task of ensuring that victims are not left with a lifelong feeling of anger or hatred towards others from the religious community that they hold responsible for their ill treatment.

Kate Green: I very much agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The debate is in part about the effect of persecution in the middle east on this country. Does he agree that in a climate in this country in which my Muslim and other constituents are reporting a rise in hatred and abuse directed at them because of their faith and ethnic background, it is important for the UK Government and authorities as clearly and often as possible to make exactly the point that he is making: that these acts are not carried out in the name of Islam or any faith?

Peter Grant: I am grateful for that intervention. I do not know whether the hon. Lady has been sneaking a look at my notes over my shoulder, but I am going to come to that point. To be honest, I am sometimes uncomfortable with that line of argument about the impact that persecution in the middle east has in the United Kingdom. We all have a responsibility to speak out and act against that persecution, regardless of whether it threatens anything about our way of life on these islands. It is more important to look at the impact that the United Kingdom can have on areas in which genocide

and persecution are happening, and whether what happens in these nations is creating a climate that makes such horrors more or less likely in future. I must say that as an example of a tolerant, pluralist society, we do not do anything like as well as we sometimes like to think we do.

Our approach must be founded on significant humility and shame about what has been allowed to happen on these islands in the name of good government, not just back in the middle ages but much more recently. I have mentioned before in a Westminster Hall debate that within my lifetime, a magazine was criminally prosecuted in a United Kingdom court for printing a poem that was deemed to be offensive to Christians. I personally found that poem offensive, but that is no ground to threaten to throw someone in jail. Within my lifetime, citizens of the United Kingdom have had to flee their homes in fear because of persecution and harassment from their neighbours for following the wrong religious tradition, and there were jobs that people were not allowed to take if they were of the wrong religion. We might like to think that we have moved on from those days, but we have not moved on that far and we did not move on that long ago. When we look at other parts of the world where intolerance has grown to extreme levels, let us not forget our own often shameful recent past.

In specific reference to the comment by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), what does anyone think was the impact on tolerance and understanding when a newspaper complained recently that Channel 4 had the temerity to allow a Muslim woman to report on a terrorist attack? What effect on understanding and tolerance does anyone think could possibly have been created when one of the United Kingdom’s highest paid newspaper columnists wrote an article suggesting that the celebration of Ramadan was somehow a threat to our peace and security?

We cannot afford to be silent about this undermining of tolerance—this deliberate and systematic attempt to create a climate of fear, of misunderstanding and, yes, of contempt and hatred of people who happen follow a different religion—right here in this city, because apart from anything else, that is presented as the attitude of the typical westerner, the typical United Kingdom citizen and the typical Christian and used as an excuse by the extremists in Syria and Iraq.

To persecute a minority, the first thing that the persecutor has to do is to create a fear of that minority. The Nazis could never have got the acquiescence of so many people for the persecution of the Jews had they not been able to make people scared of the Jews. There are journalists and others on these islands and in this very city who are embarking on a deliberate attempt to make us scared of the Muslims in order to make us hate the Muslims. At the same time as we speak out and act against the persecution of minorities in the middle east and elsewhere, we must recognise that that fuelling of hatred against religious minorities on our own islands has an impact on the way that conflicts and oppression can be addressed elsewhere.

I wish we did not have to have this debate. I would love to think that our successors two or three parliamentary generations from now will never have to have this debate. I am not convinced that we as a society—I include myself—are doing nearly enough to deal with the seeds of hatred, ignorance and intolerance in their early days

[Peter Grant]

to prevent them from growing into the unbelievable barbarity that we have heard described. I pray that one day, when we say “never again”, it really will be never, ever again.

10.40 am

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on bringing these issues to our attention in his own, traditional way, the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who also has a wonderful track record in this House, and my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker) on also bringing forward these issues.

I agree with the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) that the debate has been cross-party in nature. I am sure we all agree on the question of genocide; the question is how we go forward from here to the main Chamber. He was quite right to say that the true Islam in the Koran displays an extraordinary respect for human life, which is unfortunately not what we see under the practices of ISIL/Daesh.

Many Members mentioned the coup in Turkey. Just yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) and I spoke with members of the Alevi community here in London. We are hearing of a number of attacks by jihadists on Alevi communities in Turkey and huge concerns about the lack of order and insufficient policing. If the situation is not contained, I fear it could lead to further loss of life. That is why it is so important—the hon. Member for Congleton challenged us on this today—that we should somehow bring the question of genocide back to the House. If we are seen to stand by, then later on other atrocities will somehow seem to be acceptable.

I want briefly to address some of the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton South. He is quite right, so may I press the Minister on the question of Syria versus Iraq and what priority the Government are giving to people who genuinely have faced the same issues, yet seem to be getting different treatment at the hands of the Home Office? I share my hon. Friend's concern that we must listen to people's individual stories and make a judgment on those, rather than whether they were one inch or two on the side of a porous border.

We know, too, that women and girls have suffered particularly badly at the hands of IS/Daesh, so I wonder whether the Home Office could learn some lessons from the investment in post-traumatic counselling and therapy in Germany. What can we do to learn from that, exchange ideas and, above all, genuinely invest in those approaches? We know that over the longer term people can settle much more successfully into British society if they have had that initial counselling and support, following some of the most vile crimes which women and girls have experienced.

The hon. Member for Congleton mentioned Archbishop Gregorios, who I know very well. I was with him at St Barnabas day in my constituency. He being Cypriot, from Famagusta originally, he is quite right to say that the tragedy for Christians—for us all—is that the indigenous nature of Christianity across the middle east seems to be disappearing and, with that, so many traditions,

beliefs, beautiful art and wonderful cultural heritage. That is something we must stand up for, in the way that we stand up for all other groups as well.

Finally, may I press the Minister on the question of training for the Home Office? There is a great deal of pressure on the asylum team—they have many different pressures on them—but will he please tell us whether, as highlighted in the APPG's report, he is 100% confident that individual casework officers, who make crucial decisions on people's lives, have the right training on freedom of religion and that they understand the different religious groups and the persecution? Will he underline his commitment in this debate to high quality decision making, and not just “That will do; let's get through the pile of decisions”? As Members of Parliament, we know that people come to us in our advice surgeries desperate for a decision and desperate for their personal situation to be looked at. Will the Minister please give me his assurances that the training is up to date, that the decision making is on target and that he will pursue the issue of high quality training and retention of really good staff? We know that a lot of people have left the Home Office since 2010. I look forward to his response on that.

10.45 am

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, as I lose my virginity as Immigration Minister. I hope you will be gentle with me.

First, may I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for calling a debate on this important issue and for giving me the opportunity to respond? I pay tribute to him for his role in the all-party parliamentary group on international freedom of religion or belief, and for all the hard work that went into producing the report to which he referred. I entirely agree that the Government should do all they can to help those fleeing persecution, whether they are targeted because of their religious beliefs or for other reasons, especially given the threat posed by Daesh in Syria. This has been a useful debate, in which I have been made aware of a number of issues, which I will ponder over the summer.

The UK has a long and proud history of providing protection to those who need it. For example, since the war in Syria began, we have granted protection to over 6,500 Syrians and over 900 Iraqis in the UK. Indeed, since 2013, over 400 Iraqis have been resettled under the Gateway and Mandate resettlement schemes. Iraqi nationals will also be eligible for resettlement under the vulnerable children at risk scheme that my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (James Brokenshire), announced earlier this year.

However, our priority must be to seek an end to the conflicts in the middle east through diplomatic efforts, and to bring peace and security to the region to allow people to remain in their homes or to return to their homes without fearing for their lives. We must also continue to exert diplomatic pressure on foreign Governments to protect minorities and uphold fundamental human rights, including freedom of religion and belief.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) asked specifically whether the Government will participate in the conference in the US later this month. We will consider that and I will ask my officials to raise that with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I welcome the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) to her place. She spoke about staff training. May I make it clear that we are committed to continuous improvement in decision quality? UK Visas and Immigration recently rolled out improved training on how to assess credibility in asylum claims, which covers the types of questions to ask during an interview.

Peter Grant: It strikes me that there may be lessons to learn from the police. If someone comes forward to any police force in the UK and says they have been raped, sexually abused or assaulted, the police use specially trained interviewers who can also act as counsellors to help the person tell their story with the minimum of distress. Will the Minister tell us how the training of asylum and immigration officers compares with that given to those specialist police and civilian staff?

Mr Goodwill: There may be some similarities in the skills needed, but specifically we need to train people working for UKVI in the type of work they are doing. Not only is there the extensive five-week training programme for new caseworkers, which addresses all aspects of asylum decision making, including religious-based claims and religious conversion, but we also need to look at some types of interpreters who may be antagonistic to the religion of the person, where that person has converted, and ensure that if the interpreter is not appropriate, we find an appropriate person to provide that service.

The Government are committed to delivering a robust, comprehensive strategy to defeat Daesh in Syria and Iraq as a leading member of the global coalition of 66 countries and international organisations. We are attacking Daesh militarily, squeezing its finances, disrupting the flow of fighters to its cause, challenging its poisonous ideology and working to stabilise areas liberated from its control. Our strategy is working. Thousands of people have so far been freed from Daesh's rule and have been able to return safely to their homes.

The UK is leading the international policy debate. We are pursuing a comprehensive approach, both responding to the immediate humanitarian crisis and using our aid programmes to bring stability, jobs and livelihoods, reducing the pressures that force people to migrate. In February we hosted the Syria conference, which not only raised more in a single day than any previous event, but established a new approach to providing long-term support to neighbouring countries and the displaced Syrians to whom they are hosts. Our commitment to the 0.7% aid target ensures that we have the resources to demonstrate our global leadership in responding to emergencies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton wondered whether the Government agree that evidence must be collected for prosecutions against those who persecute religious minorities, and we are clear that those responsible for the heinous crimes that are committed—whether or not those are formally declared to be genocide—must face justice and be held accountable for their crimes. The UK co-sponsored a UN Security Council resolution to refer all those responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria, regardless of affiliation, to the International Criminal Court, and we will continue to press that.

Fiona Bruce: Will the Minister kindly undertake to discuss with the new Foreign Secretary the motion unanimously passed by the House of Commons on 14 April, asking the UK Government to honour Parliament's request to refer Daesh's actions to the UN Security Council as genocide?

Mr Goodwill: There are a number of issues that I should like to discuss with the new Foreign Secretary, and that is one of them.

We continue to deliver a huge humanitarian aid programme and have been at the forefront of the international response to the conflict in Syria. We have pledged more than £2.3 billion—our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis—which is delivering vital assistance to refugees in neighbouring countries, on the ground, right now. We are also providing £79.5 million in humanitarian support in Iraq. That is the best way to ensure that our efforts have the greatest impact on the majority of refugees who remain in the region; and we believe that our focus needs to be on providing support through humanitarian aid to countries that are facing particular pressures, while offering resettlement to vulnerable people for whom return and local integration is not viable. To that end, we operate several discretionary resettlement schemes in partnership with the UNHCR—Gateway, Mandate, the Syrian resettlement scheme under which we are resettling 20,000 Syrians, and the recently announced vulnerable children at risk scheme, which focuses on identifying and resettling vulnerable children and their families from the middle east and north Africa region. We have committed to resettling up to 3,000 individuals at risk under that scheme over the lifetime of this Parliament. It is open to all at-risk groups and nationalities, including religious minorities.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for the responses he has given about the Iraqi vulnerable persons resettlement scheme, but if that scheme were to be carried out in a way similar to the Syrian one it would enable some 300 Iraqis to qualify. Will the Minister consider that?

Mr Goodwill: We certainly keep all those matters under review. I note the comments that have been made about a line in the sand, and I dare say that things may not be written in stone; we need to keep all matters under review as the political and military situation develops in the region.

Our resettlement schemes provide refugees with a direct and safe route to the UK, enabling them to avoid risking hazardous journeys into and across Europe. UNHCR works in the region and has expertise in working with refugees and vulnerable minority groups and in identifying individuals for whom resettlement is the best and most durable solution. It also ensures that our resettlement efforts are co-ordinated with schemes offered by other countries, so that the biggest impact is achieved for the most people.

It is important, however, that those in need of protection first register with UNHCR or claim asylum with the national authorities in the first safe country that they reach. Encouraging individuals to seek asylum at an embassy or high commission is not the correct approach; nor is it a practical one. First, under the refugee convention, someone must first be outside their country of nationality

[Mr Goodwill]

before they can be considered for refugee status. That is a matter of international law. Secondly, the Government's approach is to alleviate the need to flee countries in the middle east by working to find political solutions while, in parallel, providing aid to the affected regions. A concerted effort from states to address the large movement of refugees and migrants will be discussed during the UN and Obama conferences in September.

The cases of those who claim asylum in the UK are carefully considered on their individual merits by caseworkers who, as I mentioned, receive extensive training and are expected to follow published Home Office policy guidance. I am encouraged to hear it acknowledged that we already have appropriate guidance for caseworkers. That guidance makes it clear that appropriate and sensitive questions must be asked, based on an understanding of religious concepts and forms of persecution. In particular, where a claim is based on religious conversion, the interview must explore an individual's personal experiences and journey to their new faith. I agree entirely that that needs to be reflected in practice and I can assure hon. Members that I and my officials take the findings in the all-party group's report extremely seriously. I will continue to improve training provided to caseworkers to ensure that policy guidance is followed in practice. Indeed, I undertake to create an early opportunity to see the processes being carried out, and to learn more about the challenges that we face in that regard.

Kate Green: To pursue a little further the matter of people who have converted, for many people it is not an event but a process; yet even embarking on that process can put them at risk of persecution. How can assessments be carried out to take account of that?

Mr Goodwill: I am very clear about the fact that we understand that conversion is often a journey or process—not a damascene moment, when someone sees the light. The interview questions and conversations seek to find out about that. It is not, as I said, just simple questions such as, "Name the 12 apostles," or "List the ten commandments." That is not the process we undertake.

The process provides a summary of the human rights situation in the country and clear guidance on the types of claim likely to lead to a grant of asylum, to support effective decision making and to ensure that we provide protection to those who are in genuine need. For example, we have recently revised our country information on Christians in Pakistan, following consultation with partners. I am grateful to the all-party group for its considered report on such an important topic and I have asked my officials to investigate the cases raised in it and to continue engaging constructively with members of the group.

We welcome the positive relationship that the Home Office has with the Asylum Advocacy Group and other interested parties. However, I do not think that there is a refusal culture or that the problems are endemic. UK Visas and Immigration works hard to ensure that all

claims are considered fairly and sensitively, in line with Home Office policy. In the year ending March 2016, UKVI decided more than 26,000 asylum claims and more than 10,000—40%—were granted asylum or an alternative form of protection. In his latest report on asylum casework, the chief inspector of borders and immigration noted asylum caseworkers' professionalism, dedication and commitment to fairness.

It is of course vital that we get decisions right and grant protection to those in genuine need, but we must also tackle abuse of the asylum process. Those who lodge false claims based on religious belief or conversion to delay removal when they have no right to remain here are undermining not only our immigration rules but also the places of worship that they approach to obtain support for such claims.

I hope that I have gone some way to provide reassurance that we already have a robust framework for the proper consideration of asylum claims and for granting protection where it is needed. We are not complacent, and are committed to continuous improvement in guidance, training and quality assurance processes to make sure that we get vital decisions right. We will provide a formal reply to the all-party parliamentary group's report shortly, but I can say that I accept most of what is asked of us in the recommendations and have asked my officials to take that forward in close consultation with interested partners.

10.58 am

Jim Shannon: I am reminded of the scripture text Isaiah 41:10:

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

I thank the Minister sincerely for his response, which has been excellent and in which there were some good things, including his remarks about the resettlement scheme, in response to an intervention. Daesh does not discriminate, and neither should we. I assure the Minister of the support of all-party group members, of whom there are many in this House and the other place, and its staff. Along with the work of the UNHCR, and in the light of the recent report and the work of top international refugee law professors, we want to help ensure that those who are persecuted for their religion are given the asylum assistance they need. May I kindly comment on the new training that has been discussed: several organisations working on UK religious persecution asylum cases say there is still room for improvement.

I thank the Front-Bench spokespersons and all hon. Members who have taken the time to come and make a speech or intervene, for their excellent contributions, and I will close with another scripture text: John 14:31:

"Arise, let us go hence."

Let us and the Minister work on behalf of our Christian brothers and sisters.

11 am

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Channel 4

11 am

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of Channel 4.

It is a pleasure to introduce this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer; I believe it is my first debate with you in the Chair. This is clearly an important issue. In the post-Brexit politics we are in, a number of issues are not being given the merit they deserve, and one of those is Channel 4, which, like many of our public services, is under attack by the current Government. I feel that we ought to have debates on our public assets and services, and today is an opportunity to have one.

I have initiated this debate on the future of one particular public service that I cherish—Channel 4. It is a public service that is the cornerstone of Britain's world-renowned broadcasting ecology, but one that the previous Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), was hellbent on privatising during his time in office. We need to test the Minister on whether he is going to continue along the path followed by the previous Culture Secretary in respect of Channel 4. Although we have since had the reshuffle, in which the right hon. Gentleman was removed from that position, no doubt due to his unpopular desire to wield the royal charter review against the BBC, we cannot be complacent about preventing his ambitions from being realised.

We have good cause. A recent freedom of information request, seen by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, revealed that the new Culture Minister met the previous Culture Secretary in secret to discuss Channel 4 reform options last September. It is important to put that on the record because we need to know where we are going. This is not a fresh start; there have obviously been conversations in the past and I think Parliament ought to be told what those conversations were about. It is for that reason that I called for this short debate on Channel 4's future before the House adjourns for recess. I am sorry that it is in the first week of the Minister's new duties; I congratulate him on getting the job but, for the reasons I have outlined, it is important that we have this conversation before we go into summer recess. I look forward to his comments, particularly on his conversations with the former Culture Secretary, and perhaps we can begin a debate about the future of Channel 4.

To begin with, what is Channel 4 and how does it fit into the UK's broadcasting ecology? Channel 4's statutory remit requires it to deliver high quality, innovative and alternative content, and throughout its history it has been incredibly successful in fulfilling that. Its glittering record of airing fantastic programmes has provided the channel with a consistent viewing share of 11% over some 30 years.

Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con): On that specific point, we should pay tribute to Channel 4's commitment to showing more than 700 hours of coverage of the Paralympic games. More than 75% of its presenters will have a disability and will have been trained and they are the best in their profession, which will encourage and entice other media outlets to join Channel 4 in creating more opportunities for disabled people.

Graham Jones: That is an intuitive and well-made point. I was going to come to it further in my speech, though not with such eloquence and detail as the hon. Gentleman. Besides the Paralympics, long-term programmes such as “Dispatches” have been highly successful, and Film4 productions have been critically acclaimed so it is of little surprise that Channel 4 has been unfailingly popular since its creation. What is more, as a publicly-owned but commercially-funded broadcaster, it continues to air such innovative content in a sustainable manner. Because Channel 4 is funded by advertising and is financially self-sufficient, taxpayers can watch high-quality programmes at no cost.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I, too, am a fan of Channel 4, for all of the reasons that the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) have already mentioned, and because Channel 4 supports something like 19,000 jobs and spends more—some £600 million—on content from independent producers than any other channel in the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if it ain't bust, don't fix it?

Graham Jones: Mr Stringer, I assure you I did not distribute my speech in advance of the debate, but that is a further point I will go on to elucidate. The hon. Gentleman made the point I am going to make about the financial benefits of Channel 4 and the fact that it is an aggregate benefit, operating as now in the public sector but with private funding, and it is an asset to the public.

The model is unique within the UK's broadcasting ecology. Unlike other organisations, Channel 4 operates as a publisher-broadcaster, meaning that it does not produce its in-house programmes. Instead, it commissions all of its content from independent production companies from across the UK private sector and works with more independent producers than any other channel. As a result, Channel 4 supports a vast network of small and medium-sized enterprises. Since its creation in 1982, it has spent £12 billion on content and, as the hon. Gentleman said, it spent a record £600 million on content last year alone, of which £455 million was spent on British programming. While other public service broadcasters have cut their investment in UK content, Channel 4's model has enabled it to weather market forces and increase its investment, and it therefore makes a huge contribution to the wider economy. Indeed, its own analysis has found that it adds over £1 billion to the UK's gross added value and supports 19,000 jobs per year, as the hon. Gentleman said.

Just as Channel 4 occupies a crucial space in the UK's broadcasting ecology, it also plays a vital role in ensuring that the ecology is representative of our society. According to Trevor Phillips, a former chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Channel 4 has been at the forefront of promoting minorities within our national media. Its news has a higher proportion of young and black, Asian and minority ethnic viewers than any other public service broadcaster. It is the only public service broadcaster whose overall viewership is getting younger, and its transformative impact on social attitudes, by presenting the viewpoints of BAME and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, as well as people with disabilities, has been remarkable.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I absolutely endorse everything my hon. Friend has said. Does he agree that Channel 4 has a great record of standing up to the political establishment—a role that is an essential part of our democracy?

Graham Jones: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend about standing up for democracy and for minorities against those at the top. That is an issue that we are both going through at the moment, in that we must have that conversation and support those within a pluralistic environment who wish to express a minority view. Of course, I am referring not only to Westminster and to the broadcasting ecology but to my own party. We must support pluralism, and Channel 4 does that. As mentioned by the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), the Paralympic games this summer is a fantastic example of just what Channel 4 achieves; 66% of the on-screen talent and 15% of the production team will be people with disabilities. The coverage will be more accessible than ever for disabled viewers, and Channel 4 has even set aside £1 million to encourage advertisers to make their commercial airtime more inclusive of people with disabilities.

Channel 4's success in representing people across the UK is no more evident than in its engagement with regional talent. Apart from the BBC, it is the only broadcaster with a specific commitment to invest in production outside England. Indeed, in the past five years Channel 4 has invested £720 million in content outside London. Last year alone saw Channel 4 spending £149 million on production in the nations and regions and broadcasting over 50% of its hours from those areas. It runs a dedicated nations and regions team in Glasgow and operates a growing sales team in Manchester, and it works with a range of production companies across the north of England and Scotland. Channel 4's direct investment in those areas is equally impressive. From the Northern Writers' Awards and its creation of regional hubs to its funding of the Leeds-based company True North, Channel 4 is at the forefront of promoting regional talent.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. I wonder what impact people watching “Eurotrash” 20 years ago had on the referendum, but we will park that for one minute. He rightly referred to Channel 4's work in the regions. What does he think of suggestions that the headquarters should move out of London?

Graham Jones: Any decisions specific to Channel 4 need to be thought through. I am not for immediately saying, “Oh yes, that's a good idea,” but as an MP from the Manchester region, I would welcome investment in my region and taking the headquarters out of London, as was done with the BBC. Of course, every MP would want industry to be relocated to their constituency from somewhere else. If we are to move the centre of Channel 4 out of London, it has to be done in a reasonable, organised and logical way, but I am not averse to that argument.

Channel 4's promotion of regional investment is impressive, and its model has produced a history of fantastic northern TV. As programmes such as “This is England” or “Phoenix Nights” testify, it represents a

rare example of the Government's so-called northern powerhouse at work. The nub of the issue is that privatisation would threaten Channel 4's contribution to the economy and its success, and would certainly represent a threat to its model of promoting all these things.

Selling off Channel 4 would naturally transform its operational model from not-for-profit to for-profit. Its content would suffer as a result, since Channel 4 would have to cut its expenditure on programming by £280 million per year if, like ITV, it was to return a 28% profit margin to its shareholders. Channel 4 has a turnover of £1 billion—a 28% reduction would mean a huge cut in its commitment to regional programming, talent, supporting not-for-profit programming and all the good stuff that it does. Since the broadcaster is essential for sustaining the independent production sector, that would result in a reduction of funding for small and medium-sized enterprises and reverse Channel 4's success in job creation.

A Channel 4 dictated by the needs of profit would also undermine its promotion of diversity. Under the current model, Channel 4 balances socially valuable but loss-making programming such as the Paralympic games with its more commercially successful broadcasting. However, under privatisation, programmes would be not only squeezed financially but determined by the shareholder, rather than societal value, as representatives from Sky and ITV have recognised. Channel 4 is distinct and different. That privatisation would be both economically nonsensical and socially irresponsible is made even clearer if we consider the country's recent vote to leave the European Union, since Brexit has increased economic uncertainty and revealed stark divisions between our regions and nations.

Given that the UK requires economic stability and regional representation now more than ever, will the Minister press on with the privatisation of Channel 4, effectively destroying the organisation as we know it—one that has repeatedly weathered economic storms and helped to bridge the gulf between the capital and our regions—or will he put to rest rumours of privatisation and end a period of uncertainty that is having such a negative effect on Channel 4's commercial activity? If he is going down the privatisation route, I will be very interested to know how he is going to do that.

11.14 am

The Minister for Digital Policy (Matt Hancock): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) for his contribution and for bringing me to Westminster Hall on day two of my new job. As he mentioned, I have had discussions about this issue with the previous Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and we decided as a Government to ensure that we would look at all options on the following bases.

Like the hon. Gentleman, I cherish Channel 4. It was introduced by a Conservative Government and we are proud of what it has achieved over the past 34 years. I want to see Channel 4 continue to thrive and have a sustainable future. The question is, how do we best do that? I am focused on the challenge of ensuring that the public service broadcasting system, with Channel 4 at its heart, can continue to play a leading role in the UK's cultural life for many years to come.

We are committed to public service broadcasting in the UK, which is a key driver of one of the most successful TV markets in the world. Ofcom reviews consistently show that public service broadcasting is valued by the public. Its 2016 review, which was published only last week—I am sure the hon. Gentleman has seen it—found that last year, 84% of the TV population aged over 4 watched some of the main five PSB channels in a typical week; 86% of viewers believed PSB news programmes were trustworthy; and 83% of viewers felt PSB channels helped them to understand the world.

Channel 4 is a fundamental part of the PSB system because of the range of programmes it broadcasts, its reflection of the UK's cultural identity and its distinct and different offering. As the hon. Gentleman said, it performs a role in challenging the establishment. That is something I have had direct experience of, and I have always enjoyed the rigours of the challenge that Channel 4 provides. It stands up to authority through, for instance, "Dispatches". I also endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) on the coverage of the Paralympics in 2012, which was outstanding.

Channel 4's commitment to diversity in all its forms—in terms of not only gender or ethnic background but also, for example, LGBT diversity—is a valuable and important part of its remit. Channel 4 has developed a unique character since it was established under the then Conservative Government 34 years ago. From "Countdown" to "Gogglebox", "Father Ted" and "Unreported World", Channel 4 is known for its innovation, originality and outspoken nature. It has also played a key role in the development of the independent production sector, which is now a huge sector that exports around the world and is worth more than £3 billion to the UK economy.

We need to think about this more broadly than just the channel. Through Film4, the Channel Four Television Corporation has played a role in some of the British film industry's biggest successes—"Slumdog Millionaire", "Four Lions" and "12 Years a Slave" come to mind, but there are many others. The importance of Channel 4 is recognised across the industry and across the House.

Tim Loughton: I congratulate the Minister on his new appointment. In his first week in the job, may I suggest that this is an opportunity to preserve the innovative legacy of Mrs Thatcher when she created Channel 4 in the 1980s, and to make a name for himself by creating certainty for what is, as he and other hon. Members have commended it for, the most successful, diverse, creative, youth-engaged and innovative British-backed broadcaster, by saying once and for all that Channel 4's future in its current form is safe in his hands?

Matt Hancock: My hon. Friend tempts me, but the broadcasting market is changing rapidly. That is why the previous Secretary of State decided to look at all the options. It would be a bit previous of me, on day two in my job, not to consider where that work has reached in our goal of a sustainable future for Channel 4.

Graham Jones: I accept and respect that this is day two of the Minister's current job, but he had previous conversations about Channel 4 with the former Culture

Secretary in his previous ministerial post, so it is not necessarily day two. Is he ruling out or ruling in privatisation and a sell-off?

Matt Hancock: It is also day two for my Secretary of State. The issue needs to be considered realistically in the face of the facts. Channel 4 acknowledged the risks facing its business model in its 2015 submission to Ofcom's PSB review when it said:

"Channel 4 believes the potential downside risks associated with...factors, such as a faster shift to on-demand viewing, the emergence of new disruptive entrants, faster fragmentation of audiences, production cost inflation outpacing funding, and structural changes to the licence fee of TV, outweigh the potential opportunities. Moreover, Channel 4 is arguably the PSB most likely to face the future first, given its focus on risk-taking and trying new things, and also its targeting of young audiences, who are the most avid users of new technologies and platforms."

That must be true. Some 94% of its total revenue comes from TV advertising, and with so much of its revenue coming from advertising, an open question remains about how Channel 4 is affected by shocks to the economy, such as Brexit. It is our duty to make Channel 4 sustainable.

Kelvin Hopkins: I congratulate the Minister on his new appointment. Will he, at the very least, take back to his colleague in the Government and to the Secretary of State the strength of feeling that has been conveyed from both sides of Westminster Hall this morning?

Matt Hancock: Of course. I think we are about to hear a bit more.

Graham Jones: I want to follow up on this interesting exchange. I recognise the passage that the Minister read from Channel 4, but it would be disingenuous to suggest that its position going forward is that it wants to change its model. Channel 4 executives are happy with the current ecology and want it to remain. They respect and see the challenges going forward, but at the moment their preferred option, by a considerable margin, is as we are, not for change.

Matt Hancock: As a Conservative, I understand the arguments against change. They exist in almost any circumstance, but that does not mean we should not look to the future and at the risks and opportunities it provides, and the way things are organised so that they make the most of the opportunities and mitigate the risks. That is what we are doing. I hope the hon. Gentleman has heard in the tone of my response that it is our approach to do that in a way that supports public service broadcasting and some of the unique attributes that Channel 4 brings to that broadcasting.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I reiterate the point about the executives being happy both with being scrutinised and with wanting surety for the market. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) that we would like to hear that Channel 4 is safe in our hands. Its achievements include issues such as transgender, and it is making its future safe with "Come Dine with Me", which I think is funding most of the opportunities for diversity that the company is

[Mims Davies]

bringing forward. I absolutely applaud the Minister for continuing to look at all the options, but I hope he comes back to the option that we are already at.

Matt Hancock: It is important to get this right and to take the time to come to the right conclusion. After all, the main channel, Channel 4, where most public service broadcasting resides, has seen its audience fall from more than 10% to under 6% over the last decade. We must take such things into account.

There are some concerns about the remit. Key to driving the public service broadcasting aims of Channel 4 is the remit, which has evolved over time. There are concerns, for example, about Channel 4's performance against the requirement to provide content for older children. Ofcom has repeatedly raised this concern and the Lords Select Committee on Communications recently concluded that Channel 4's current programming in this area is unsatisfactory. We must go into the full details of how the remit is executed to make sure we have got that right.

Ofcom also found that spend on first-run UK-originated children's programming has fallen by 45% since a decade ago. Older children's programming is an important part of the remit as written.

Graham Jones: This is an interesting debate. On the Minister's point about falling viewing figures in the last decade, there is now, of course, a plethora of choice and channels. It is natural that, for example, if in his West Suffolk constituency there are 10 candidates on the ballot paper, everyone receives fewer votes, but if there are two candidates, everyone gets more. It is a bit like television channels.

The Minister says that viewing figures have fallen, but that is because of the plethora of offers available. The key point is that Channel 4 is not making a loss. It is still breaking even on its viewing figures. That is a key

issue that we need to and should remember. It is not losing viewing figures and money; it is losing viewing figures because of diversity across the platforms, but it is not losing money. It is still providing wonderful content, which is probably better than 10 years ago.

Matt Hancock: The viewing figures I set out were a proportion of the market. The hon. Gentleman is right about Channel 4's current financial status, but it acknowledges the risks because such a high proportion of revenue comes from advertising, which is, as everyone knows, a highly cyclical part of business and there may be shocks to the economy, not least the impact of Brexit, which is as yet impossible fully to ascertain. I take his point, but the matter must be looked at in the round.

I hope I have demonstrated the Government's commitment to Channel 4 following its rich and proud history, our acknowledgment of and support for its work in promoting a plural and diverse element of our national life, its holding authority to account with rigour and innovation, and my personal commitment to Channel 4 and seeing it thrive sustainably. We will certainly take on board the points that have been raised from both sides of the Chamber. We will consider them over the summer with a mind to ensuring that Channel 4 has a strong and sustainable future. I have no doubt we will have the opportunity to discuss these matters again.

I have been remiss in waiting until the last minute of this debate to welcome to the Front Bench the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who has a long history of involvement in these issues. We will make sure all views are considered and that, as we consider how the remit should be set going forward and how to ensure that Channel 4 is strong and sustainable in future, all voices in the debate are heard.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Contribution of Poles to UK Society

[GERAINT DAVIES *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of Poles to UK society.

It is a great pleasure to introduce this debate. First, I acknowledge the tremendous work that the Polish ambassador, Mr Witold Sobków, has undertaken during the past four years in cementing bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and Poland. In my estimation, Mr Sobków has been one of the best diplomats to the Court of St James's. Unfortunately, we are losing him shortly, because he is going back to Warsaw to work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but this great Anglophile has worked tirelessly to promote relations between our two countries, and I take this opportunity to thank him for his contribution to Anglo-Polish relations.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): On behalf of the Opposition, may I associate ourselves with those comments about His Excellency Witold Sobków? We entirely endorse the very generous comments. He has been an excellent ambassador. He is a man who has been not just a great friend to this country, but a great representative of the Polish people in this country. On both sides of the Chamber, we are honoured and delighted to associate ourselves with the hon. Gentleman's words. [*Interruption.*]

Daniel Kawczynski: I think this is the first time that I have heard applause from the Public Gallery, but that just goes to show what a popular figure His Excellency is.

As the first ever Polish-born British Member of Parliament, I take great pride in my Polish roots, and I feel a sense of responsibility, given my Polish background, in sometimes putting to the fore, in the crucible of the House of Commons, issues pertaining to Anglo-Polish relations, but also the wellbeing of the huge Polish diaspora who currently live in the United Kingdom. I remember that 16 years ago, when I was first considering standing to be a Member of Parliament, I was told by a very senior person that I would never become an MP "with that completely unpronounceable Polish surname" and that I would have to change or anglicise it if I was ever to be elected as an MP in this country.

I refused to do so. I told that person in no uncertain terms that I would refuse to change my surname, because I am very proud of my Polish roots; and I have to say, having been elected now on three separate occasions by the people of Shrewsbury to represent them, I think that is testimony to the way English people, British people, treat outsiders who have come into this country and welcome and accept them. That is a wonderful thing. I think we are one of the most tolerant nations in the world. I went on business to more than 90 countries around the world before I became a Member of Parliament and I think the British people are among the most tolerant and welcoming of any in the world.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): From one colleague with a difficult-to-pronounce name to another, may I very much welcome what my hon. Friend is doing this afternoon? Just from a historical perspective, the contribution of Poles to this country goes back to the Spitfire pilots in the second world war. The Polish community club in Dunstable in my constituency is a very welcome and important part of the community. All of us completely and utterly reject the reprehensible attacks that we have seen from a small part of the community on some Poles in this country.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention; I concur with him.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): In the same vein, may I say that, as my hon. Friend may be aware, unfortunately a few weeks ago a vile racist action occurred in my constituency of Huntingdon and led to anti-Polish leaflets being distributed. I want to thank him for giving us the chance today to set the record straight and for giving me the chance to give the view of the overwhelming majority of my constituents, who were horrified by that unacceptable activity in our town, which has no history of such behaviour, and who welcome, applaud and value our Polish residents for their hard work and their significant economic and cultural contribution to our local community.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I will say a little about some of those issues later.

Some Polish journalists say to me, "How can you, as someone of Polish origin, have campaigned for Brexit? How could you have done that when, by extension, it will prevent more Poles from coming to the United Kingdom?" I can understand why some Polish media commentators complain about some of us campaigning for Brexit, but I am not going to be prescriptive here. It is not for me to tell all 850,000 Poles living in this country where their loyalties ought to lie, but for some of us who have come to this country and settled here and whose families have been born in this country, our loyalties have moved to the United Kingdom.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP) *rose—*

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP) *rose—*

Daniel Kawczynski: I will give way in a second. I think it is very important for those Poles to understand that when some Poles have moved to the United Kingdom, although we will always cherish Poland and our roots and links with that country, our new loyalties must lie with the United Kingdom.

Neil Gray: On that point, in my constituency of Airdrie and Shotts we have a thriving Polish and eastern European community. I have been concerned to receive some correspondence from Poles and other nationalities who are concerned about their residency future. Does the hon. Gentleman believe, as I do, that the Government could be doing more to reassure those residents and workers in this country, including in my constituency, of their ongoing future in this country?

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, and I will refer to that specifically in the main body of my speech, so let me get on with it before I take any other interventions.

With regard to the Brexit vote in the referendum, I believe that the main reason was taking back control—my constituents in Shrewsbury wanted to take back control—but there is no doubt that immigration played a part in it. I have had many discussions with the Polish Government, the Law and Justice party, which is affiliated to the Conservative party in the European Parliament, and I have tried to make them understand that although the free movement of people is a very important concept and a fundamental right enshrined in the European Parliament—by the way, it is even more important for Poles, who were locked behind the iron curtain for 50 years—we have to have an immigration policy that is managed and sustainable. It is not in the interests of Poland or the United Kingdom for there to be completely unmanaged flows of people between these two countries.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab) *rose*—

Chris Stephens *rose*—

Daniel Kawczynski: I will give way in a minute; I just want to finish this point. I could take people now to Polish towns and cities that have been completely depopulated and where there are real risks, dangers and difficulties in being able to provide certain services as a result of the brain drain of young Poles away from Poland; and I could take people to communities in Britain where so many EU nationals have come that there is a real strain on local schools, public services and housing stock. I make this point because I think it is very important. If we are to convince the nationals of both Poland and the United Kingdom that their rights will be enshrined going forward, we need to demonstrate that we can get a grip on immigration in the interests of both countries.

Mr Jim Cunningham: We should not lose sight of the fact that, certainly for the last 100 years, the Polish community or their descendants have made a major contribution in this country. There were Polish children in my class at school, and in the area that I represent and the Binley area in particular, there were Polish miners. More importantly, the Poles made great sacrifices during the war—at Monte Cassino, and in the RAF at the battle of Britain—so we should do everything in our power to stop any discrimination, not only against Poles but against other nationalities.

Daniel Kawczynski: Absolutely, I agree with that. The hon. Gentleman may disagree with me. He may believe that there ought to be free movement of people in perpetuity. I do not: I believe that immigration has to be managed and controlled for the interests of the state.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that Polish people who are already here, including in my constituency in Cheltenham, are making a superb and vital contribution to our society? Does he agree that we need to make it clear to them, as soon as possible and given their contribution, that they are welcome, valued and secure in our country?

Daniel Kawczynski: I absolutely, wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend and I will be coming to that point again in my speech.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Daniel Kawczynski: I will take just two more interventions and then I must get on.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Polish communities in this country have integrated themselves into British society extremely well? Part of that is due to the excellent work ethic that Poles have shown. For example, in my own service, as it were, I have members of the Polish community, and I would find it very difficult to find a British person who had the same work ethic.

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. May I dare to venture that if we wanted the ideal sort of immigrant, it could possibly be a Pole? Hard working, ethical—I will come on to all the attributes that my constituents talk about Polish workers here having, but yes, they make a huge contribution.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for securing this debate, but I am finding it difficult to follow his argument. This is a debate about the contribution of Poles to the United Kingdom, and now he seems to be wanting to stop the free movement of Poles to the United Kingdom. Clearly, for myself and my colleagues from Ealing, my hon. Friends the Members for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), with the largest Polish communities in the country that simply does not make sense and is out of touch. Will the hon. Gentleman say whether he supports, while we are in the EU—not just up to 23 June, but while we are in the EU—and will accept the free movement of Polish citizens to this country?

Daniel Kawczynski: I will come to that point later in my speech, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am sure that when we do pull out of the European Union there will continue to be opportunities for highly skilled Polish workers, who will ultimately be able to apply for work permits to come and work in the United Kingdom if their skillsets match our skill shortages. I do not see a dichotomy in what I am saying.

Chris Stephens *rose*—

Daniel Kawczynski: Let me make progress. I am not going to take any interventions for a few minutes.

During the battle of Britain, the Polish 303 Squadron got the highest number of kills. Let us just reflect on that. The 303 Squadron shot down more enemy aircraft than any other squadron. Winston Churchill talked about how there was

“so much owed by so many to so few.”—[*Official Report*, 20 August 1940; Vol. 364, c. 1167.]

That is a phrase that certainly I have remembered and it sent a very poignant message. Ten Polish fighter squadrons supported the British war effort and they flew alongside their British comrades not only throughout Europe, but in North Africa. In 1941-42, Polish bomber squadrons

formed an astonishing one-sixth of the manpower available to RAF Bomber Command. Again, I would like colleagues to contemplate that: one-sixth of the manpower for the whole of RAF Bomber Command came from Poland. That is something that Poles are very proud of having contributed. We will come on later to talk about what they are contributing to Britain now, but that was a historic contribution.

No other country sent as many airmen and soldiers to fight in the battle of Britain as Poland. That is something we should celebrate, and we should thank the Poles for that unique contribution. When we talk about the differences between what Britain will be like post-Brexit and what it is like now, that is a drop in the ocean compared to what our country would have been like if we had not defeated fascism in 1940. One can only try to envisage what sort of society we would be living in now—not just here, but in Poland and across the whole of Europe—if those brave airmen had not, in certain cases, sacrificed their lives in order to fight and defeat fascism.

Of course, many of them had left Poland, their country brutally occupied, taken over and suppressed, but they did not give up. They did not just sit back and take it; they left Poland, sometimes via very dangerous routes through Iran and the Soviet Union, and they came here to continue the fight. Some of them were described as “kamikaze”—a word that I have heard repeated on many occasions—because they had lost everything. They had lost their families, their homes and their country, so they came here to continue that struggle against fascism.

Nine hundred Polish servicemen lost their lives serving Bomber Command and by the end of world war two, 19,000 Poles were serving in the RAF. Poles are very proud that their country contributed so much to the British war effort. That is recognised because we have a Polish war memorial at Northolt. I have to say that the Cabinet Minister who has been with me to the Polish war memorial most often, and who has engaged with the Polish diaspora on more occasions than any other—from my interpretation—is the current Foreign Secretary. As Mayor of London, he understood the importance of the Polish diaspora to our capital city, and he has been with me on many occasions to engage with the Polish diaspora. I very much hope that his experience of engaging with the Polish diaspora in London will help him, in the important coming months and years, to cement bilateral relations with Poland, despite the fact that we are disentangling ourselves from the political union that is the European Union.

Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): My hon. Friend may not know that in Southampton there are more than 13,000 Polish nationals. In fact, Southampton is the home of the Spitfire, which was flown by so many Polish aircrew. They contribute positively to our community and are very welcome. On the subject of the EU, which is my reason for intervening, I voted to leave the political structures of the EU, but I did not vote to repatriate UK nationals who live in the UK. Will my hon. Friend join me in celebrating our Polish communities and the significant contribution they make in cities such as Southampton, and condemn those who seek to create division where no divisions exist?

Daniel Kawczynski: Absolutely. I know that my hon. Friend has engaged with the Polish diaspora on a number of occasions and is a great champion of them in his constituency. I completely concur with his sentiments.

It was not just the battle of Britain; it was not just the pilots flying during the battle of Britain; it was the Enigma code. Many people think that the Enigma code was broken at Bletchley Park. The first crack of the Enigma code took place in Poland and when Poland was occupied, Polish cryptographers, mathematicians and experts came from Poland to Bletchley and continued their work assiduously there. That contribution by the Poles in Bletchley has been marked recently, because relatives of those who served at Bletchley have been invited to services there to commemorate the contribution of their relatives. There are plaques, and more information is now being disseminated to schoolchildren visiting Bletchley about the unique contribution made by Poles to the British war effort. Breaking the Enigma code must have saved hundreds of thousands, if not millions of lives. If we had not broken those codes, the war would have been protracted for potentially many more years. By breaking those codes we finally began to understand what the German strategic battle plans were and react to them. Again, the Poles played an extraordinary role.

One of the most moving things I have done in the 11 years I have been a Member of Parliament was to visit the war cemeteries in Libya. I spent an afternoon walking along the rows of British and Polish tombstones. Many young Polish and British men died together, in the desert in Libya, far away from their countries but in solidarity together to defeat fascism. That will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Stephen Pound: I realise that if we are going to talk about Polish heroism, we will need a lot more than an hour and a half—we would need a week and a half, at the very least. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will come on to Monte Cassino and General Anders, but can I ask him to place on record his appreciation for the Polish navy, which very seldom gets appreciated? Let us not forget that it was Commodore Francki, commanding *Blyskawica*, who sank the *Bismarck* and that it was Polish naval forces who defended the city of Glasgow during the Clydebank blitz. The Polish navy made an enormous contribution, but they seldom get thanked and recognised. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would wish to do so on this occasion.

Daniel Kawczynski: I am very grateful for that intervention; I agree with the hon. Gentleman. In representing one of the Ealing seats, he knows a great deal about the Polish community. I know that he loves *paczki* very much—that is the Polish for doughnuts—and he and I have often shared doughnuts from Poland. He is very assiduous in understanding his Polish community and I pay tribute to him for the interest that he has taken in representing so many Poles in Ealing.

Today, we have over 2,500 Polish doctors and many Polish nurses working in the United Kingdom. I would like to share an example of something that happened to me in Shrewsbury. The head of one of our most successful care home organisations—it has care homes across the whole region—came to me and said, “I would like you please to put me in touch with a Polish agency that can

[*Daniel Kawczynski*]

help me to find care workers for all our care homes.” I said to him, “Why do you want Polish care assistants?” I rather suspected that it may have been a monetary issue. He said, “To be honest with you, we have done surveys among all our residents and they have asked specifically for Polish care workers, because they are so attentive, kind and understanding, and they want to engage with residents and treat them with dignity.”

Every country has its strength and weaknesses, but as somebody who was born in Poland, who lived there and who goes there many times throughout the year, I think the way in which Poles are educated from a very young age about the importance of looking after the elderly, and how they are schooled by their families and society about the importance of care for the elderly, is second to none. I talked about how Britain is tolerant to outsiders and how other countries can learn from us; I think other countries can learn an awful lot about how Polish people treat the elderly. It is ingrained in them from a very early age, so I was very proud when the care home owner said to me that his residents had specifically asked for Polish care workers.

Poles have a reputation for having a very strong work ethic, for honesty and integrity, and for being polite, professional, punctual and non-exorbitant. Think about it: whether someone is looking for a plumber, a doctor or a dentist, or any other professional, those are very good adjectives to describe the sort of service that one would hope to expect from a professional. My message to all the Poles, whether they are plumbers, bricklayers, fruit pickers, doctors, lawyers, technicians, engineers or chefs, is that they all contribute—each and every single one of them—to this country and I am very proud of the contribution that the 850,000 of them make to our country.

Chris Stephens: Of course, it is still to be determined whether Scotland will be leaving the EU or not—[*Interruption.*] Well, that is still to be determined. The Ethnic Minorities Law Centre in Glasgow has reported to me that since the EU referendum, a number of Polish citizens have been to it with concerns about what will happen when the UK leaves the EU. In Glasgow, the Polish community has made a fantastic contribution to our city. Does it concern the hon. Gentleman that many Polish people are going to the Ethnic Minorities Law Centre with those concerns?

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, it does, and I will finish off my speech by raising that issue.

Mr Davies, with your permission, I will read out a brief statement from a colleague of ours from the Tory Benches—the Minister of State, Department for Education, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). He was not able to come today because of ministerial duties, but his statement, which he wanted me to read out, better exemplifies the contribution of the Polish diaspora than I could ever have done. He is very eloquent in what he has written, which is about Harlow, the constituency that he represents so well. He says:

“I have a fantastic Polish community in my constituency of Harlow. They have opened up some wonderful shops in an area where the high street was otherwise empty and closing down. Their butchers, delicatessens and health spas in the town centre have really helped to regenerate the area for the better.

They also pay a local state school in the Town for the use of their facilities on a Saturday to run a brilliant Polish school. The children who speak perfect English, are taught Polish, and their parents, whose first language is Polish, are helped to improve their English. I went to visit this school a couple of weeks ago to hand out their end of year awards. It was an honour to meet such hard working teachers, students and parents who contribute so much to our society.

However, it saddened me when someone I met there asked whether they would be allowed back in to the UK if they went back to Poland to visit their family for a holiday in the Summer and to hear others tell me about racist incidents they have had to deal with. I did my best to reassure them that they are welcome here and that nothing would change if they left for a holiday.

We should be celebrating all of the hard work and positive contribution of migrant communities that greatly benefit our society. I believe it is the responsibility of those in public life, of politicians, journalists, and anyone with a voice, to stand up and speak out against racism and to promote and celebrate the massive benefits that Polish, and other migrants, give to our country.”

Finally, I will come on to the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and deal with Brexit and the renegotiation. According to the House of Commons Library, there are 3.03 million EU citizens in the United Kingdom, as we speak—so, a little over 3 million—and there are 1.7 million UK citizens in the European Union. By the way, this is where I disagree with the Scottish National party—I have heard both the SNP and the Mayor of London speak about this. Both the Mayor of London and the SNP are singing from the same hymn sheet in saying that we must give a blanket assurance to all these EU nationals before we know how our own citizens are going to be treated in the European Union. I disagree with the SNP line and the Mayor of London’s line. I believe that our priority, first and foremost, should be the 1.79 million British citizens living in the EU. It would be highly irresponsible for us to give any assurances until we know that our own citizens’ rights have been protected in remaining in the EU countries where they have selected to live.

However, one crumb of comfort that I can give to the hon. Gentleman is that of course I understand the uncertainty that many of these hard-working Poles are facing as a result of the changes that are taking place. I believe and very much hope that the Minister will take back to the highest levels of Government—this is my message and the nub of my argument to him—the message that the rights of EU nationals must be at the forefront of our renegotiation. When we start this renegotiation process, because we are talking about human beings, their rights and their ability to stay and work, I very much hope that this can be catapulted to the very front of the renegotiations that are going to take place.

Chris Stephens: Does the hon. Gentleman not believe that part of the reason why there is so much uncertainty over EU nationals is the tone and rhetoric adopted by many of the people who were at the front of the leave campaign during the referendum?

Daniel Kawczynski: Well, I disagree with that. I do not know what happened in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, but in my constituency of Shrewsbury, we

had a very professional debate. We focused on constitutional matters and the ability to take back control. Actually, in my constituency there was very little discussion about immigration. Admittedly, we do not have many migrants in Shrewsbury, but immigration was not the predominant issue that resonated at public meetings that I attended.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman spoke earlier about a care home that specifically wanted Polish workers. It is a fact that a great number of Poles now work in the national health service, care homes and many other services. Does he agree that, in the uncertainty about what will happen during the course of Brexit, there is a real danger that those people will decide to go back to Poland or elsewhere in the European Union, leaving us with the problem of filling their posts? Whatever happens elsewhere, it is important to ensure that the people we now rely on are allowed to stay in the United Kingdom.

Daniel Kawczynski: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I just made the point to the Minister that when we start the renegotiation processes, it is vital that the interests of the 1.79 million Brits in the EU and the 3 million EU citizens here are at the top of the agenda.

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP) *rose—*

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP) *rose—*

Daniel Kawczynski: I am about to finish, but I will take two final interventions.

Philip Boswell: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must ensure that current EU citizens in the UK are made permanently welcome, regardless of what others do? We must be better than those who practise racism and bigotry, and we must lead on the issue.

Daniel Kawczynski: Yes, of course. Where I disagree with the Scottish National party and the Mayor of London is that they have called for an immediate determination of the rights of the EU nationals in our country without even securing the rights for our citizens in the EU. That is simply wrong. We are talking about human beings and I am sure that, in the renegotiation process, we want to end up with a mutually respectful and beneficial outcome for the residents and citizens of the EU and Britain.

Dr Alasdair McDonnell: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has paid much reference to Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, there is a presumption—maybe a negative one—that there are still two tribes or two communities at odds with each other. In fact, a host of new communities are coming to constituencies such as mine to work and to make a life for themselves and their families. In south Belfast, there are many good, hardworking and decent Polish people who make an enormous contribution to our life and the economy, and we would be much worse off without them. There is also an active Polish consul, working for integration throughout the community.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is quite a bit to be learned from the Northern Ireland experience about the interaction and integration of foreign nationals,

particularly of the Polish community? That experience could be transferred, and some of those lessons—successes and failures—might be useful in the broader UK context.

Daniel Kawczynski: I very much agree with that. I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman has taken the time to explain the situation in Northern Ireland, which I did not touch on as I focused predominantly on England, where my constituency is. I am heartened. The Minister has seen the number of hon. Members who have come to this debate to highlight the impact of the Polish diaspora in their constituencies.

The overall sentiment of MPs here today has been to acknowledge the contribution that the Polish diaspora makes to our country, and to highlight concerns, as my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr Djanogly) so eloquently described, about the attacks on Poles that we have read about in the media. We want assurances from the Minister that everything will be done to stamp out and penalise those who seek to commit such offences and, at the earliest opportunity, we want the Government to reassure Polish nationals that if they were in the country before 23 June, their rights to remain will be protected.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Mr Kawczynski has spoken for 34 minutes. I was hoping to start the Front-Bench speeches at half-past 3. There are a number of speakers, so each speech should last for about five or six minutes. I ask Andy Slaughter to start us off.

3.4 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): That is very kind of you, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this timely and important debate. He paid tribute to the Polish community and its contribution to this country in war and in peace over a considerable amount of time.

It is right that we remember the contribution of the Polish armed forces in the second world war: in the air in the battle of Britain, which is well known about; on land at Monte Cassino; and, indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North mentioned, at sea, including in the battle of the Atlantic and at many other important and pivotal points of the conflict. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham also mentioned Enigma and Bletchley Park.

The contribution of Poles to the victory in the second world war cannot be overestimated. There is a history of Polish migration before the second world war, but when we look at the issues that now face the diaspora community, it is particularly important that there has been continuity since that time, especially in west London—including my constituency of Hammersmith—where perhaps the largest Polish community in the country is based. In tragic circumstances, fleeing not just Nazism but communism, the community came here, settled and has contributed in an extraordinary way since that time, so we have what are generally known as the old Poles as well as the new Poles in west London.

There are now not just shops and many famous restaurants, such as the Patio Restaurant in Shepherd's Bush; there is the Polish Social and Cultural Association—

[*Andy Slaughter*]

POSK—and the St Andrew Bobola church in Hammersmith. There is a settled and established community that contributes in every way. We probably do not acknowledge that enough, but in a way it speaks for itself.

What has happened since the Brexit vote concerns me, which is why I intervened on the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham. I asked quite how he squared his strong support for Brexit—I think he was a remainer originally and then became a Brexiteer—given that the overwhelming response from the Polish community in Hammersmith, whether they are now British citizens or are still Polish citizens, has been one of dismay and despair, partly because of the insecurity that the vote has created. I will come to that in a moment and address some questions to the Minister but before I do, I want to talk about the physical and emotional impact of, and the response to, Brexit.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I apologise for not being here at the start of the debate. A number of people have spoken to me, saying that they just do not feel welcome any more. It is difficult to get that across and to change attitudes. I have spoken to a vast range of people, many of whom are investing and creating jobs in the country, and if they do not feel that they have a future in the country, they will leave and go somewhere else, and we will lose those jobs.

Andy Slaughter: I do not want to be melodramatic or exaggerate matters because that does not help. The Polish community is modest and stoical in the way it conducts itself, and the last thing it wants is to have attention drawn to some of these matters. On the other hand, we have to speak out because we must reassure people and speak out against the abuse, outrage and violence that is happening. If people do not accept that that is happening, they should do what I did: Google for five minutes. I came up with about a dozen incidents, and, of course, the problem affects other EU and non-EU communities. Brexit has given destructive forces in our society licence to make racist and other attacks across the board, not just on EU nationals. On the whole, it is not intelligent people who are doing this.

I will give a few examples. A Polish shopkeeper was taken to hospital after he was abused in his shop in Leeds. In Huntingdon, as was mentioned earlier, there were cards that read, “Leave the EU, no more Polish vermin”. There have been verbal and physical assaults, with the Metropolitan police and police forces across the country reporting a substantial rise in incidents and racist attacks. A family in Plymouth were targeted when a fire was started in the shed next to their house. They managed to escape without injury but with substantial damage to the property. An eight-year-old child in Humberside told his classmates to go back to Poland. In Yeovil in Somerset, in the west country, a Polish man was asked whether he spoke English before being repeatedly punched and kicked. He required hospital treatment for potentially life-changing eye injuries and a fractured cheekbone.

Such incidents are happening every day in our country in a way that I would not have imagined. I am afraid it is a consequence of Brexit. It is not the behaviour of

people who voted leave; it is a licence that dark forces in our society feel they have been given by the vote that took place. I feel particularly strongly about this because of what happened to the POSK centre in Hammersmith. It has been there for 50 years. I went to school opposite. I have been going there for 50 years. I used to perform on the stage there. I eat there, I drink there, I socialise there, as do many non-Poles across west London. As a hub for the Polish community, there is nowhere that is more integrated than that centre, and yet it was sprayed with racist graffiti, in a way that has never happened before, directly after the Brexit vote. So we have to act.

I want to praise my local authority in Hammersmith, which, provoked by the incident at POSK, brought together all communities—there are more than 100 communities and languages spoken across Hammersmith—in what we called a unity day. On that Sunday, more than 4,000 people came and marched through Shepherd’s Bush and Hammersmith and ended up at Ravenscourt park for a celebration of what makes us stronger. I am pleased to say that Wiktor Moszczynski, who many people know from the Federation of Poles and as a former west London councillor, spoke on behalf of the Polish community on that day. The event addressed the issues that I am speaking about and it meant that we felt we are much stronger and louder and have more powerful voices than those forces that would divide us. I thank everybody in the communities who took part in that event.

Time is short, so I will end now with two or three questions to the Minister. First, we must have an answer to the question of security for EU citizens in this country. I have a great deal of time for the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, and I respect his work on civil liberties, but the comments he made at the weekend, about how new EU migrants who come to Britain could be sent home to stop a pre-Brexit immigration surge, have added to the confusion. We need to know not only what will happen to Polish and other EU citizens who were in the UK prior to 23 June, but what happens to those coming here now, and certainly up to the time, which could be three or four years hence, when we exit the EU. I do not know whether the Minister is able to answer that today, but he should say as much as he can.

Secondly, the Minister should say what the Government are doing to reassure communities that feel under threat and unwelcome in a society where they may have been not just for years, but for decades. Thirdly, what specifically will be done about Poles who are studying here at universities and paying a reduced fee because they are EU citizens, but whose courses may take them beyond Brexit? Will they suddenly be asked to pay hugely higher fees? What will be done to reassure employers who employ Polish people, but who will be thinking, “Are they going to be sent back? Should I be investing in their training? Should I get rid of them sooner rather than later?” All those issues are for today, not for two or three years’ time.

I am extremely grateful for this debate. We are united in highlighting the contribution that Poles have made to this country, but we have created a problem not just for the Polish community, but for many other migrant communities here. Whatever our views on Brexit, it is

the job of the Government and all of us to solve that problem, and I would like to hear about that from the Minister today.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): We have three speakers with five minutes each.

3.14 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): This morning one of my constituents, a lady called Kamila Avellaneda, emailed me. She is of Polish origin and she asked me to please go to the debate on Poland in Westminster Hall. I thought, "Why not?" My wife is half Polish. Her maiden name is Podbielski and she is now called Claire Podbielski-Stewart to keep the name alive. So I have a half-Polish wife.

I was an intelligence officer when Poland was a member of the Warsaw pact, and we considered Poland to be the least reliable Warsaw pact member. We thought, "If we have to go to war with the Warsaw pact, the bloody Poles would come on our side, Mr Ambassador." That is what we thought and we considered that to be a real credit to Poland.

When I was the commander in Bosnia, I also had a Polish major as my interpreter. He was an extremely good interpreter and very good at drinking slivovitz.

We have already talked about the second world war, so I will try to avoid repetition. However, as an intelligence officer, may I reiterate the point about what happened south of Warsaw on 25 July in the Kabaty woods? I hope I pronounced that correctly. The Kabaty woods is where the Polish bombe—an ice-cream, but actually a machine—was handed over to the French and the British and was ultimately responsible for helping us to crack the Enigma code. The Poles did it. They started it. The French, the British, the Americans did not have it, but the Poles had it.

When Poland was invaded on 1 September 1939, followed by the Russians coming in from the east on the 17th, a Polish Government in exile was started. Mr Davies, how long do you want me to speak?

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Five minutes.

Bob Stewart: Right, sir.

Stephen Pound: Not more.

Bob Stewart: It will not be more. It will be five minutes, I promise.

The Polish Government in exile was outstanding. They built up the fourth-largest army in Europe after the United States, the British and the Soviet Union. The Polish army recreated branches of the forces not only on our side of the divide, but in the Soviet group of forces. Polish forces were part of the Soviet forces heading towards Berlin via the Vistula and across Ukraine, and of course through Poland, and they stayed there until the Nazi menace was defeated. It is extremely interesting that 6,339 Poles are considered to be Righteous Among the Nations, because a large number of Poles tried very hard to defend the Jews in their country. Let us remember that Auschwitz was set up for the Poles, not for the Jews initially.

We had magnificent fighters pilots: 303 Squadron with its 126 German kills has been mentioned, and there were many more squadrons. The army was outstanding. The Polish army, working with the British army, was outstanding at Tobruk. It went into Narvik with my uncle, who was an army commander. Mind you, my uncle did have problems later. He may have got a Military Cross, but he also got two years in Strangeways for bigamy. *[Laughter.]* I am afraid my family are pretty disreputable.

The Poles took the top of Monte Cassino. Has anyone looked at that mountain? Can you imagine what it was like to go up those broken sides with all that fire raining down on you? But the damn Poles did it, and they put the Polish flag on the top. God, they were great. The Poles dropped at Arnhem and we had Popski's private army. I think he was Polish; I cannot remember, but I think he was part of the Special Forces.

I have 30 seconds left to say what I think of Poland. I think it is a damn good country. We are very lucky to have it as an ally. The Poles are really decent people. I visited it for the first time three months ago and—my God—I am going back there, and I am very grateful that we have such wonderful people as part of our NATO alliance.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I call Gavin Robinson for another five minutes of fun.

3.19 pm

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart)—although I do not know how I am supposed to do it. It was a great contribution from a disreputable but great man.

Bob Stewart: It is my family who are disreputable.

Gavin Robinson: Guilty by association, Mr Davies, I think you will agree.

I want to thank and congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski). I have been in Parliament a year now, and I have had the opportunity to meet and know the hon. Gentleman and to work with him in the all-party group on Poland. He obviously has a strong personal connection to the country, but he has worked tirelessly for the UK Polish community and for the social integration of those who believe in this country. Aside from the difficulties and the negative comments between Opposition Members and the hon. Gentleman about Brexit, no one can challenge his devotion and commitment to the country or the results of that commitment.

As Lord Mayor of Belfast, I was pleased to host events such as independence day for Polish citizens in the city. We have a wonderful honorary consul in Northern Ireland, Jerome Mullen, who does great work, particularly at difficult times. We have had numerous incidents of race hate-filled attacks in my constituency and throughout Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham knows that that is part of my motivation for being involved in the all-party group and trying to build the bonds to bring to an end such unnecessary hate in my city.

[Gavin Robinson]

It was a huge privilege to welcome the ambassador to my constituency and to Titanic Belfast for the first ever Northern Ireland-Poland business conference, just over a month ago. It was encouraging to see how many businesses from across Northern Ireland have built up relationships and connections and are trading. They have the tenacity to ensure that when we leave the European Union, the connections, relationships and bonds will strengthen still, no matter what. We must be politically committed to achieving that.

In view of the negative press, if there is anything I can do in the next two and a half minutes, I think it is to challenge many of the myths that abound in Northern Ireland and, I am sure, in communities throughout the United Kingdom. There is a champion of Polish integration in Northern Ireland called Eva Grosman, who has committed herself to the Unite Against Hate campaign. She does remarkable work in Northern Ireland. She sent a tweet earlier in the week asking how many Northern Ireland MPs would attend the debate. I indicated that I hoped many would—and the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) has attended. We received quite a lot of abuse, along with misconceptions and downright lies. Such things—along with the facts—are laid out in a document I want to draw on, by Professor Peter Shirlow and Dr Richard Montague, called “Challenging Racism: Ending Hate” and published by the Unite Against Hate campaign.

The social attitudes survey replicated in the study said that 70% of people in Northern Ireland believe that EU migrants and migrants generally are a drain on services—that they steal our houses and jobs. That is nothing new. We will all have heard similar things quoted. However, in Northern Ireland, not even 2.5% of the population—43,000 people—hails from the EU. The figure for migrants is 4.3% of the population, but they have only 4% of the jobs, so they cannot be stealing the jobs. They are not stealing the jobs. As for social housing, we have 89,000 such homes in east Belfast, yet Polish migrants occupy 337. Does not that put into perspective the bile put about in our community? EU nationals contributed £8.8 billion a year more to the UK economy than they cost to services. In Northern Ireland from 2004 to 2008, there was a £1.2 billion addition to the local economy through ingenuity, hard work, the determination to strive, and the belief in British principles and the ideals of this country. Coming to Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom; believing in our people but, more importantly, believing in themselves—that is the contribution that Poland makes to this great country.

3.24 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): Poles are welcome in this country. Let that be the message that comes out from today. We appreciate and value that community in this country. Those bonds, forged in blood at a time of war, cannot be broken. For me, one of the great tragedies of the present situation is that the Polish community, which I have known all my life, is going through so many changes now. When I first met Poles, they were disguised. I am talking about the '50s and the early '60s: every Pavel was called Paul, every Malgorzata was called Margaret, every Marek was called Mark. They

did not wear their Polish heart on their sleeve. We had the Polish churches, Polish national day and Polish celebrations, and even the Government in exile, but the Poles were quiet people. They got on below the radar, with the Polish Saturday school, gradually leading up to the Polish church, the Church of our Lady Mother of the Church. It was not until the Polish millennium in 1966 that the Polish community began to gain the confidence to stand proud and be Polish. I can still remember many of my Polish friends wearing England shirts in 1966. They told me it was not so much that they supported England—but we were playing Germany.

In 1995, an enlightened mayor of Ealing known as Stefan Funt, *Polski burmistrz na Ealingu*, actually placed the Polish eagle on the mayoral chain of the London borough of Ealing. One of Mr Ambassador's predecessors, His Excellency Ryszard Stemplowski, kindly authorised the placing of that crown, that 10 zloty piece, on the mayoral chain. For me, the sadness is that, whereas that community has grown in strength and confidence and has grown roots in the London borough of Ealing—which is twinned with Bielany Warszawa in the Masovian Voivodeship—all those links are now under threat.

My daughter teaches at Cardinal Wiseman high school in Greenford. A pupil went in to see her two weeks ago and said, “Miss, am I going to be exported?” That is a boy whose grandparents fought for this country. They came to this country in the fight against fascism in the hour of our need. Go to the Polish war memorial on the A40. Go, if you can bear it, to the Katyn memorial in Gunnersbury, commemorating the horrors of Katyn in 1940. Go to see all the physical evidence of the Polish community, who have made such a vast contribution, and then pause for a moment and say, “What are we doing? What can we do individually to say to our Polish friends, ‘We respect you, we want you—do not leave us. We will not desert you. We are not asking you to leave. We are holding you closer into our arms.’?” Why? Because this is a community that has given so much. It is not a community that has asked or taken; it is a community that has given.

Sheltered housing has been mentioned. Maximilian Kolbe House was created by the Polish community for elderly Poles, not by going to the council or the Greater London Council or London County Council, or whatever it was in those days, but by creating something themselves. I could mention the Marian Fathers and Our Lady Mother of the Church, or POSK, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) mentioned and which I remember as the King Street Baptist church back in the day—I never appeared on stage, but I used to play football against them. Look at Courtfield Gardens. Look at everything that the Polish community has given.

I will never forget meeting members of the Polish community when Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary and we arranged for compensation and reparations for the forced labourers. I spoke to elderly Polish ladies of incredible, unimpeachable dignity, wearing fur coats that still smelled of mothballs in many cases, showing me the passes that they had been issued with when they were taken from Lwów to Bavaria as forced labourers. This is a community that has suffered so much, but which has the strength, courage and confidence to rise above that suffering and stand proud, not just in Ealing

but throughout the United Kingdom. I associate myself strongly with the remarks of the former Lord Mayor of Belfast, the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson).

Have we come to the stage now where those proud people, who gave and suffered so much, and who have paid the price of citizenship in blood and their effort, look to the future in fear and trepidation? I thank the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for giving us the opportunity to place on record the fact that we respect the Poles and want them to stay. We need them in this country and wish to hold them in our arms. Poland, we respect you. Poland, we love you. Poland, we thank you for all that you have given. Your home is here. May it forever be so.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): I call Rupa Huq to speak for two minutes before I call the Front-Bench speakers.

3.29 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The word “Ealing” has popped up in almost every other sentence in this debate. As the third Member of Parliament for the borough, I wanted to put some remarks on record.

The last Office for National Statistics figures show that Ealing is 6.4% Polish, which is more than the national figure of 1.2%. Those are the statistics, but I also grew up with Polish people. I had a Polish maths teacher at Notting Hill school, Mrs Siemaszko, and a Polish physics teacher, and the Dabski-Nerlich and the Dunin-Borkowskas were my best friends at school. Poland has also shaped Ealing’s cultural landscape. My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) mentioned what is known as the Windsor Road Polish church. Originally a Victorian Gothic church from 1834, it had fallen into disrepair by the 1970s. It has become the highlight of my year to go to the civic mass there, and there are also community facilities. The most recent time I went was for a sad occasion, and the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) came. He is doing an inquiry into the emboldened post-Brexit racists.

I echo everything that has been said about the attack on the POSK centre. One of my constituents, John Zylinski—if we are going from A to Z—was on the ballot paper for the London mayoralty. I am sure the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski)—with whom I share an unpronounceable name and, possibly, “unlikely MP” status—would agree that Polish people should integrate into mainstream parties, not run as separatist independent candidates. Maybe the Minister could adopt some of the issues on which Zylinski stood. He is someone I get on with personally, and he wanted a statue to the ex-servicemen whose history we have heard about from both sides of the House today. Maybe that could be considered; I do not know whether it is in the Minister’s jurisdiction.

We have several Polish newspapers in Ealing—*[Interruption.]* My two minutes has elapsed. I could have gone on for so much longer. I used to lecture in two-hour bursts, so two minutes is difficult for me. I salute the Poles of Ealing and worldwide. The modern diaspora lives on.

Geraint Davies (in the Chair): Maybe another time. I invite Mike Weir to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party for up to nine minutes.

3.32 pm

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I am pleased to appear under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this important debate.

We have heard a lot about the second world war, but the connections between Scotland and Poland go back much further; indeed, Bonnie Prince Charlie was partly of Polish descent. We must also remember that, for example, two of the UK’s major stores were founded by Poles: Michael Marks of Marks and Spencer was a Polish Jewish refugee, and Jack Cohen of Tesco was also Polish, the son of a tailor who emigrated to London. Many of us will have seen the first episode of Joseph Conrad’s “The Secret Agent” on BBC this Sunday. Conrad was also a Polish immigrant to the UK, and was not fluent in English until his twenties.

In my part of eastern Scotland, there is a substantial community of Polish descent. Like many others here, I went to school with several children of Polish parents who had come to Scotland, fleeing the Nazi invasion of their homeland, to continue the fight as part of the UK’s armed forces. During that period, Scotland received a huge influx of Poles. Although we have heard much, rightly, about the contribution of Polish airmen to the war effort, they also made a huge contribution in the other branches of the armed services.

As the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) said, the Polish navy also came to Scotland. In September 1939, after the invasion of their homeland, four Polish destroyers sailed into the Forth port of Leith. Polish ships were stationed at Rosyth, Port Glasgow, Greenock and Dundee, and throughout the war they fought alongside the Royal Navy. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) paid tribute to the heroism of Polish naval personnel in fighting the Luftwaffe during the terrible blitz of Clydebank during his recent debate in memory of that terrible event. He said:

“So precise was the Luftwaffe’s delivery, in a spread-out formation, that of the thousands of bombers, only two would be shot from the sky in an valiant attempt by the crew of the Polish naval destroyer, ORP Piorun, in the dock of the greatest shipyard on the Clyde, John Brown’s.”—*[Official Report, 15 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 925.]*

A plaque in Prestwick commemorates the Polish seamen who perished in the battle of the Atlantic. As has been noted, Polish troops took part in the ill-fated expedition to Norway in 1940, and in the battle for France. After the fall of that country, many came to the UK to continue the fight. Some were stationed in Scotland, as far afield as Cupar, Leven, Milnathort, Auchtermuchty, Crawford, Biggar, Duns, Kelso, Forres, Perth, Tayport, Lossiemouth, Arbroath, Forfar and Carnoustie. You will note, Mr Davies, that many of those places are in eastern Scotland, as the Polish division was given the specific task of protecting east central Scotland from a German invasion. That is why we find so many of Polish descent in my part of the country.

In the Angus county town of Forfar, a plaque outside the courthouse commemorates the occasion in March 1941 when King George VI and Queen Elizabeth joined

[Mike Weir]

the Polish commander General Sikorski to take the salute from Polish troops. The 10th Armoured Brigade under General Maczek—I hope I am pronouncing it right—were stationed in the town at the time. Other units stationed in Angus included the 10th Cavalry Brigade, the 10th Mounted Rifle Brigade, the 24th Lancers, the 14th Lancers, the 16th Battery Field Artillery, the 10th Engineers, the 10th Signals and a field ambulance unit. Nearly every town and large village in Angus has a connection with the Polish forces.

Those forces played an important part in the protection of the UK and the eventual liberation of Europe from the Nazis. Indeed, General Maczek commanded the First Polish Armoured Division, which fought from Normandy to Germany. After the war, many did not return to Poland but remained in the UK—some because, in the way of these things, they had met and married locals and settled in our nations, others because they had been loyal to the Polish Government in exile and could not return safely to a Poland ruled by a Stalinist dictatorship. General Maczek had his citizenship stripped from him. He settled in Edinburgh and lived until he was 102.

The descendants of those brave soldiers are now second and third-generation Scots, and they are as Scottish as I am. They have made an important contribution to our nation that should be celebrated. In recent years, the number of Polish people settling in Scotland has risen again, due not to war, thankfully, but to economic reasons. According to the 2011 census, Scotland's Polish community has grown by 52,000 since 2001, but to put that into perspective, that makes up around 1% of Scotland's entire population.

Scotland has suffered from years of population decline, but the population is now growing, partly due to new immigrants. We see that as a positive thing. Many of those new Polish immigrants are the most economically active. They work hard, pay their taxes and contribute to our society. In Angus, many have worked in the farming and fish processing industries, but many have also worked as doctors, dentists and other professionals. Many of our rural areas have a problem attracting such professionals. They are very welcome to assist in maintaining our public services.

These new immigrants are becoming part of our local communities, forming ties like their wartime predecessors. Many times when out canvassing in my constituency, I have come across families where the adults' English is not good, so they call for their children, who speak to me in a strong local accent and translate for their parents.

Dr Huq: The hon. Gentleman mentions his canvassing experiences. My first experience as a candidate was being lobbied by Wiktor Moszczynski, who has been referred to, on this Government's plans to abolish the Polish A-level. It is a welcome U-turn to add to their list of U-turns. Has he come across that too?

Mike Weir: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. The point I was making is that those children are part of our future. Many were born here or have spent most of their lives here. We should welcome the contribution that their parents also make to our nation.

The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham mentioned Brexit and what will happen to Poles and other EU nationals. It is not only in those people's interests that the situation should be clarified. Polish immigrants make a huge contribution to our society through work and in our professions; it is in our interests as well to make the situation clear. If we do not do so—if those people leave our country en masse and go to other European Union nations or back home to Poland—it will have a devastating effect on our national health service, in our care home sector and in many other sectors. We owe it to them and to ourselves to make that point clear now. Whatever our view on our future with the EU, we should all stand together and tell those who are here—those who have made their home here—that they are welcome to stay and that there is no chance of them being thrown out if and when we leave the EU.

3.39 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): What a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this debate and I thank him for the comprehensive briefing I received from his office. The passion he has for his culture shone through his speech. Indeed, I have rarely heard such passionate speeches in Westminster Hall. I would like to associate myself with the passion of all the speakers in this debate and say that we welcome the Polish people, we embrace them; we feel we want to put our arms around them and hug them.

Let us be honest: in the aftermath of the vote for Brexit, many people have been left uncertain about what is to come. Polish people have lived and worked in the UK for many years, but they are being made to feel unwelcome in their own communities and some are experiencing blatant racial abuse. I have received feedback from people who tell me that they have had notes put through their door telling them to go home. Who can forget the vandalism of the Polish centre, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) referred to? It is appalling that that should have happened just days after the Brexit vote. Less than two weeks ago, a Polish family living in Plymouth were subjected to an arson attack; their shed was set alight just metres from their home. A note was put under their door, telling them, "Go back to your ... country." It was not the first xenophobic attack that that family had experienced.

I voted to remain in the EU and am disheartened by the result, but nevertheless we have to respect the vote. But we should not use it as an instrument for hate crime. In my own city of Swansea, which I share with the esteemed Chair, we have a proud multicultural background. We became the UK's second official city of sanctuary in 2010. We have a large Polish community, among other cultural groups, all of whom play a really important part in our local economy.

Earlier this month, the shadow Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), asked the then Home Secretary—now Prime Minister—to reassure EU nationals currently living in the UK that they had a right to remain. There was a vote, which was overwhelmingly in favour—245 votes to just two. Both public and business organisations benefit enormously from the contribution that all EU nationals make, many

of whom are from the Polish community. They make a difference to our lives every day. Our NHS benefits greatly from them; more than 55,000 of the 1.2 million staff employed by NHS England are EU nationals. A report by University College London revealed that European immigrants made a positive financial contribution of £4.4 billion to the UK between 1995 and 2011. Many EU migrants, Polish people among them, contribute far more to the UK in taxes than they will ever receive in benefits and services.

All the foreign nationals who come to live and work in the UK are of important economic benefit to us all. They provide the diversity and the culture that make Britain great—be they Polish, European, Asian, African, Australian or whoever. I believe all foreign nationals contribute greatly to our society, and long may that continue.

3.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) for securing this important debate, and I thank hon. Members for their many and varied contributions. This has been an extremely good and constructive debate.

The Polish contribution to the United Kingdom is absolutely woven into the fabric of our society. Even when we check the weather on the BBC, we see Tomasz Schafernaker, who, like my hon. Friend, was born in Poland. When we go into our towns and on to our high streets, we visit Tesco and Marks and Spencer—both companies founded by Polish Jewish immigrants to Britain. We should welcome the contribution that Poles have made and continue to make to our country. This is a long and proud relationship, born out of both adversity and entrepreneurial desire.

We have Poland to thank for one of our most famous medieval kings, King Canute the Great, who was the son of a Polish princess and the nephew of Boleslaw I of Poland. We have King Canute, ruler of Denmark, Norway and England, to thank for bringing comparative peace and prosperity to these isles at the time. By the 16th century, we imported most of our grain from Poland, and Polish merchants and diplomats came regularly to London. Poles were such an established part of everyday life by that time that even Shakespeare thought they were worth a mention in “Hamlet”. By 1608 Polish craftsmen helped the first permanent English settlement in the Americas—Jamestown—to thrive.

We can find evidence of the early Polish contribution to British society right here in London. After the battle of Vienna in 1683, a pub in London’s Soho was named after the King of Poland, and soon afterwards the street on which it stands was named Poland Street—it exists to this very day. Britain has been a place of sanctuary for Poles for centuries, including in the 19th century, when many Poles fled the Russian empire in search of political sanctuary. That cemented Britain’s place as one of safety for Poles, as well as many other communities, which continues today.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham, thousands of Polish men and women made a crucial contribution to the allied war

effort, which directly led to the formation of the Polish British community as it exists today. In 1940, with the fall of France, the exiled Polish President, Prime Minister and Government all transferred to London, along with the first wave of at least 20,000 soldiers and airmen. Poles formed the fourth-largest allied armed force after the Soviets, the Americans and the combined troops of the British empire. In Poland’s time of despair, they did not give up; they came to Britain in their thousands, to help to fight for the future of our continent. Poles were the largest group of non-British personnel in the RAF during the battle of Britain, as a number of hon. Members have said, and the fearless 303 Polish Squadron was the highest-scoring RAF Hurricane squadron in that battle.

Dr Huq: May I recommend to the Minister the book “Wira of Warsaw: Memoirs of a Girl Soldier”, by my constituent George Szlachetko, about his mother Danuta, who was part of the underground resistance? She was a teenage girl soldier in the war. I warmly recommend that book, which I went to the launch of recently.

Mr Jones: I thank the hon. Lady for that recommendation. With the summer coming up, that may well be a good read. I will come in a moment to a very important point about the very situation that she mentions, but first I would like to continue on the theme of the battle of Britain.

Bramcote Airbase, which was on the edge of my constituency, Nuneaton, is where the RAF was responsible for training all the bomber aircrew for Polish forces in 1940, with four Polish bomber squadrons formed there. In fact, there was an air crash around that time; in the cemetery at Nuneaton, there are Polish airmen buried along with German and British airmen. We still commemorate those losses every year, to make sure that we remember the contribution that the Polish made at that time.

Bob Stewart: The reason why the Royal Air Force had so many Polish pilots was that they were extremely well trained and had fought for us in the battle of France before the battle of Britain. They were very well trained and we were very grateful that they were with us.

Mr Jones: I defer to my hon. Friend’s superior knowledge. He knows far more about such matters than I do. What he said is borne out by the fact that the Polish squadron was the highest scoring RAF Hurricane squadron in the battle of Britain.

It was not just in the air that the Poles excelled in the second world war. Girls and women today would do well to look at the contribution of one of the Special Operations Executive’s most daring operatives, Christine Granville, otherwise known by her Polish name, Krystyna Skarbek. She proved that being brave and fighting for one’s beliefs is not just a male preserve. On the battlefields, the Polish army, under British High Command, was instrumental at the battle of Monte Cassino, which was mentioned by colleagues, and at the battle of Arnhem, among many others. Perhaps most importantly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham and several other colleagues highlighted, we have Polish cryptographers to thank for cracking the early versions of the Enigma machine. That laid the foundations for

[Mr Marcus Jones]

subsequent British successes in deciphering German military signals, which proved a key factor in many allied successes during the war.

Poles were with us in our darkest hour, as they were with thousands of Polish Jews in theirs. More than 6,000 risked their lives to save Jews from the horrors of the holocaust. Poles constitute the largest national group within the “Righteous Among the Nations”, an honour bestowed on recipients by Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to the victims of the holocaust. Considering the harsh punishment that threatened rescuers, it is an extremely impressive number.

To ensure that the murder of millions of Polish Jews is never forgotten, the Department for Communities and Local Government is working with From the Depths to preserve the memory of the holocaust and give a name to those who were murdered, particularly those, including many Poles, who were placed in unmarked graves. That will offer some level of closure to the remaining holocaust survivors—including in Polish communities in this country—who have never known their loved ones’ last resting place. There are an estimated 10,000 sites of mass murder in eastern Europe, with only around 30 commemorated in the past three years. The project we have undertaken will rectify that.

Along with many others in this House and throughout the country, I reacted in absolute horror to the spike in incidents of hate crime following the EU referendum. My colleagues Baroness Williams, the then communities Minister, and Lord Ahmad, the then Minister for Countering Extremism, saw at first hand the effects of such mindless acts when they visited the Polish Social and Cultural Association—POSK—which my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham mentioned earlier in the debate. They met the Polish ambassador, His Excellency Witold Sobków, who I am really pleased to see in the Public Gallery.

I want to make it absolutely clear that we will not tolerate those few individuals who target people because they are different. Our police forces are on alert and have encouraged people who have experienced hate crime to report it to the police. We have zero tolerance for all forms of hate crimes, whichever community they are perpetrated against. Just as Polish men and women stood by us during the second world war, we will stand by those who have come more recently and who have contributed to our national life.

Our communities must be open, tolerant and welcoming. I am pleased to say that my Department is working with Near Neighbours to fund projects that promote integration and support social action—projects like the one in Birmingham run by the Polish Expats Association, which is holding a series of events to promote Polish music and culture, along with that of other communities. The project will also hold fundraising events to help the homeless community in Birmingham. I am pleased that, in his capacity as chair of the all-party group on Poland, my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham will meet my departmental colleague, Lord Bourne, to discuss how we can continue to counter hate crime and promote integration in communities throughout the country.

Today, there are thousands upon thousands of Polish citizens and people of Polish origin making a difference to the UK. My hon. Friend and others have highlighted

their vital contribution. That is nowhere more true than in the NHS, where, according to the figures we have from the Department of Health, more than 6,700 Poles work.

Andy Slaughter: I am glad that the Minister mentioned the NHS. He will no doubt have seen the article in today’s *Daily Telegraph* by the NHS chief executive, Simon Stevens, in which he wrote:

“It should be completely uncontroversial to provide early reassurance to international NHS employees about their continued welcome in this country.”

Will the Minister address the concerns I raised about employees and students, and about the reassurance we are giving to Polish nationals in this country about whether they can stay?

Mr Jones: The Cabinet Office, the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office issued an extremely important statement on 12 July. If the hon. Gentleman reads that statement carefully, he will see that it provides significant reassurance to members of the Polish community, and quite rightly so.

Poles are known for their entrepreneurial skills. In 2014, it was estimated that 22,000 companies had been set up by Polish-born entrepreneurs, with a further 65,000 registered as self-employed. Poles are employed throughout our society, including right here in this very House. Polish people have enriched our country, and while the UK remains in the EU, all its citizens continue to enjoy the rights and status they had prior to the referendum. The Government want to be able to guarantee the legal status of EU nationals who are living in the UK, and we are confident that we will be able to do so, but we must also win the same rights for British nationals living in European countries. It will be an early negotiating objective for the Government to achieve those things together. Some Members have expressed concerns that that might not be a high priority for the Government, but I hope I can reassure them that it will.

Mike Weir: I hear what the Minister is saying, but does he not accept that the continuing uncertainty might lead to people drifting away from the UK? That could have a serious impact on the NHS, public services and many businesses.

Mr Jones: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not think that the type of rhetoric he and his party are using is helping the situation either.

Mike Weir: It is not rhetoric; I was asking a question!

Mr Jones: I have been clear in demonstrating that the Government absolutely want to ensure that we guarantee the status of the EU nationals living in the UK.

In conclusion, I am sure that all Members present, as well as the people in the Public Gallery, will wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham for bringing this important debate before the House. We have always welcomed law-abiding migrants to this country, and the contribution of the Polish community to this country should absolutely be celebrated.

3.59 pm

Daniel Kawczynski: I am grateful to the Minister for the way he has tried to answer some of the questions we have posed to him. I look forward to working with him over the coming months to ensure that the Polish diaspora is protected. I am very heartened by the number of colleagues who have attended the debate and highlighted what is happening with the Polish diaspora in their constituencies. I am proud of the support I have received today and look forward to seeing the issue with the diaspora settled as soon as possible.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the contribution of Poles to UK society.

Squash and the Olympic Games

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered squash and the Olympic games.

It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and it is great to see the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), in her place. I know how passionate she is about sport and I promise not to mention how well Wales did in the football.

So there I was in the newly built Bridgend recreation centre in the summer of 1975, working as a part-time sports assistant in the summer holidays, earning money to get me through university. Sport has always meant so much to me. I was very shy when I was a child and was bullied, so my mother sent me to judo classes to strengthen me up. I got a black belt first dan when I was 13 and a fourth dan in 1974. I may come across as being rather feeble but I do have a dark side, so be very scared.

I went on to represent Wales schools in hockey, tennis and athletics. Sport gave me a focus and confidence, and it made me a team player, so working in sport is an absolute pleasure. And now it is difficult to stop me talking.

Anyway, I was teaching in the main hall of Bridgend recreation centre when I heard this “thud, thud” noise, so I went to investigate. I climbed some stairs to a balcony and saw two men in a room using strangely shaped tennis rackets to belt a little rubber ball into submission. It was love at first sight—with the game, not the men. I hired a racket, scrounged a ball and spent every spare minute between shifts on court, teaching myself to play squash.

The players at Bridgend recreation centre adopted me and I joined the squash club. I made the men’s team and was spotted by Squash Wales, which invited me to the trials for Wales ladies. That was in early December and I did not hear anything afterwards, so I assumed that I had not made the grade. Then, just before Christmas I was reading the sport section of the national newspaper, as you do, when I saw, “Chris Rees makes home international team after playing squash for only six months”, so I thought, “Ah, that’s a really nice story,” before realising that it was referring to me. The selectors had forgotten to tell me that I had been picked.

There began a long career. I represented Wales more than a hundred times, playing at No. 1 for the team in some matches, and I won some titles, including the Dutch Open. However, I lost the Welsh Closed Final eight years in a row, which takes a bit of doing. I seem to remember that one year I was two games up and 8-0 up with match ball, and I managed to lose 10-8 in the fifth game. That was a classic Rees performance.

Squash has given me so much: fun; fitness; friends; and a job. I retired as a player in the 1990s and in 2004 I called Squash Wales as I was looking for an old friend. The director of coaching and development, Mike Workman, said, “Chris Rees! Haven’t heard from you for over 10 years. Thought you were dead! We need more women

[Christina Rees]

coaches. There's a course tomorrow—I'll put your name down." So I said, "No, I'm a player. I can't coach. I haven't picked up a racket for 10 years." Somehow I lost that argument with Mike and I lost many more when he subsequently became my boss.

I ended up on that course and many other coaching courses. I became a level 3 coach, a tutor, an assessor and a Welsh national coach. I also had the honour of being awarded Sport Wales Female Coach of the Year in 2008. I am the only racket sport coach to have received that award—so far. Playing for Wales, representing my country and pulling on that red shirt was one of the best experiences of my life, but finding a youngster and coaching them through from being a beginner to playing for Wales, and watching them develop skills and tactical maturity, is much better.

It is difficult to choose just one player to speak about today, but Josh Lee was only nine when I started coaching him. He was so small that he used two hands to hold the racket, on both the forehand and backhand sides, but he was so talented that he was beating children much bigger than himself by being clever. Nevertheless, being two-handed restricts a player's range of shot and their ability to reach for the ball, and it is very wearing on the hips. I knew that if Josh wanted to make the Welsh squad, I had to turn him into a one-handed player, but that meant he would have to go back to square one and lose to players he had never lost to before. I explained to him what I was doing and he understood. So we used a cut-down racket. He felt stronger with his left hand, so we tied his right hand behind his back. Then we spent many hours recreating his swing and grooving his shots. He went on to become a fine player and represented Wales. I am so proud to have helped Josh and all the other children I have coached.

Many people are surprised to learn that squash is not an Olympic sport; they assume that it has been in the Olympics for many years. Sadly, that is not the case. Squash is gladiatorial, dynamic, physically demanding and mentally challenging; it is like chess on legs. It teaches players strategy, tactics and how to outmanoeuvre an opponent, so it is an ideal grounding for a political career.

Squash is the only racket sport where players share the same space and it is a sport for life. Children as young as four are taking up squash and there is a masters circuit for everyone from the over-35s to the over-75s, with competitions in many countries, as well as the world and European championships. Welsh men became the over-70 world champions; they were all skill, trickery and bandages, but there was not much movement.

Over the years, the rules of squash and the dimensions of courts have become standardised, although some would argue that the rules are open to interpretation and manipulation, which sounds a bit familiar. Just ask our Squash Wales world referee, Roy Gingell, who has refereed some of the toughest and most competitive matches on the world circuit. He used to have hair like mine when he started refereeing; now he has a "Wayne David haircut".

Why is squash not in the Olympics? It is a complete mystery to me. The International Squash Rackets Federation was formed in 1967; it is now called the

World Squash Federation and is recognised as the international federation for squash by the International Olympic Committee. We now have over 50,000 courts in more than 185 nations, from the Arctic circle to the bottom tips of South America and Australia. Squash is a genuinely global sport that is played by millions of people all over the world. There have been male and female world champions from every continent. Last year, 47 countries hosted professional senior tour events, featuring players from 74 nations.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Being another retired squash player myself, I have listened to my hon. Friend's speech with great interest. Does she agree that squash is more in keeping with the Olympic spirit than synchronised swimming, and that when squash was introduced to the Commonwealth games in 2002, both singles and doubles matches were hugely successful and enjoyed by both the public and the participants?

Christina Rees: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and I completely agree with him. I have yet to see the advantages of synchronised swimming, however hard I have tried.

Glyn Davies (Montgomeryshire) (Con): I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for securing this debate. We are really dragging out the old squash players today; I, too, have loved the game for many years. We have watched golfers pulling out of the Olympic games; I understand why they are doing so, but not their comments about the Olympics not being the pinnacle of their sport and in a sense not being valuable. If squash was in the Olympic games, the Olympics would be the main tournament in the squash calendar. Squash would take its place as an Olympic sport more readily than golf and many other sports have done.

Christina Rees: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. It would have been the pinnacle of my career to win a medal at the Olympic games. I do not understand golf. It involves spending five hours on a golf course, hitting perhaps 100 balls, while on a squash court it is 100 balls in five minutes. I am sorry, but I do not get it. That is my personal opinion.

There are more than 750 players from 69 countries competing on the men's and women's professional squash tours. The World Squash Federation—WSF—world junior circuit for boys and girls embraces world, regional and national junior open events. We have WSF world and European rankings for seniors, juniors and masters. Squash has full gender parity and has begun to offer equal prize money for major competitions. The sport is fully World Anti-Doping Agency—WADA—compliant.

SQUASHTV is a WSF bespoke production, with staff who travel to all major events, providing quality and consistency. We have super-slow-mo replays, multiple camera angles, in-play stats, live web transmission and full-match video-on-demand uploads. Super HD was introduced in 2015, and Sky, Fox, Al-Jazeera and others have broadcast agreements. The world series finals were shown live in 47 countries in Europe by Eurosport.

State-of-the-art all-glass show courts have been introduced, with glass floors and side door options. Squash is very cool now; it is presented very differently on the professional tour from how it was when I used to

play. There is music, lighting and MCs. An old friend of mine, Robert Edwards, started the cool commentaries, and became known as “the voice of squash”. There is a great connection between players and spectators. Para-squash is well established; for example, deaf squash has its own world championships, and the German squash federation is making excellent progress with wheelchair squash in an effort to meet the requirements of the International Paralympic Committee.

Squash has been a Commonwealth games sport, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) mentioned, since 1998, a Pan American games sport since 1995 and an Asian games sport also since 1998. The WSF has been working with the International Olympic Committee—the IOC—since 1986 to get squash included in the Olympic games, but at that time the sports included were set in stone, so it has been an uphill task to get squash in.

How does it work? The decision on which sports are included in the games is made at the same time as the successful bidding city is announced. In 2005, London won the bid to host the 2012 games, and the sports for 2012 were announced, with squash coming top of the shortlisted sports to be included. To be included would have been amazing, because at that time James Willstrop of England was ranked No. 1 in the world and Nick Matthew of England was ranked No. 2—gold and silver Olympic medals. Jenny Duncalf of England was ranked No. 2 in the world and Laura Massaro of England was ranked No. 3—silver and bronze medals. I must admit that our Welsh players were not quite as highly ranked.

It was not expected that any places would be available among the then 28-maximum sports to be included in the London Olympics but baseball and softball were taken out, so we thought that squash would be in. However, we then fell foul of a rule that new-entry sports should have a voting threshold of 75%, which none of the shortlisted sports had, so London ran with only 26 sports.

Then, in 2009, the two vacant spots for the 2016 games were filled by rugby sevens and golf. Some may say that that was commercially attractive after the 2008 crash. It was then decided that a sport would be removed from the 28 sports in the 2016 games to make room for a new sport in the 2020 games. Wrestling was removed, but then added back in to a shortlist of eight. The list was then reduced to three sports: wrestling, baseball and softball—now combined—and squash. But in 2013, wrestling—not a new sport—was voted back in, when squash was, in fact, the only new sport on the shortlist.

Baseball is a major sport in Japan, so Tokyo was very keen on baseball. The IOC gave the host country the right to nominate new sports. Originally these were squash and baseball because they were the two on the shortlist, but Tokyo was encouraged to open it up to any sport. The city selected a shortlist of eight from the 25 sports that had applied. In August 2015, each sport gave a presentation to the IOC, and in the September Tokyo selected five sports, not including squash. They were baseball and softball combined, karate, skateboarding, sports climbing and surfing. Surfing does not even have an international federation that is recognised by the IOC and, because of concerns over the level of waves in the Japanese ocean, a wave-making machine like the Snowdonia model might have to be installed. We cannot get away from Wales, no matter how hard we try.

The host for 2024 will be decided in 2017. The front-runner appears to be Los Angeles, but we have no idea whether there will be any space for new sports. Squash would be inexpensive to introduce, with men’s and women’s singles draws of 32 each. The competitions would take place on two courts over six days with two spectator sessions each day, and only 20 refereeing officials would be needed. Existing squash court venues could be used or glass show courts could be set up. Each show court could accommodate 4,000 spectators, using steep seating to create a fantastic atmospheric arena. There is no need for a warm-up venue because players train on the courts on which they compete. Imagine what two show courts in Horse Guards Parade would have added to the London games.

I understand that the co-vice-chair of our new all-party parliamentary group on squash and racketball, the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), had some discussions with Mr Speaker to see whether a show court could be set up in Speakers Court, so that MPs, peers and staff could have the squash experience. But that might have caused a few by-elections. Will the Minister pledge her Department’s support to squash at both grassroots and elite level? Will she shed some light on what has gone wrong with the bids to include squash in the Olympics, and will she help us to campaign for squash to become an Olympic sport?

We had a World Squash Day in 2015, on Saturday 10 October. This year’s day has not been announced yet, but perhaps the Minister would be able to join us. We would be honoured if she would join our APPG on squash and racketball.

4.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): Yet again, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) on securing the debate. I am slightly concerned that two of the three parliamentary squash players who contributed to the debate are Welsh. When the hon. Lady invites me to play squash in the future, we ought to have regional competitions to see what happens. To be perfectly honest, I do not fancy my chances against the three of them, and I used to play squash.

The hon. Lady need not apologise for Wales’s performance in the Euros. I think that for a while we were all Welsh, somehow or another, and we should take this opportunity to congratulate the Wales team on their performance. They did the whole country extremely proud.

There is no doubt that the case to include squash as a future Olympic sport has been made with great passion and conviction today. I am aware of the hon. Lady’s great interest in squash and recognise the valuable contribution she has made to the sport as a top-class player and as a coach—I am now slightly in awe of her sporting CV. It is a tribute to her commitment that she is the only squash coach to receive the Sport Wales female coach of the year award to date, although I hope that the accolade will be awarded to her successors, building on her great work in the sport.

Squash is indeed an exciting, dynamic sport and it has a rich heritage in this country. The national performance centre in Manchester is helping to build world-class

[Tracey Crouch]

strength in depth, and three men and six women are currently in the top 20 rankings. Recent British world champions, including Nick Matthew and Laura Massaro, are great exponents and role models, and inclusion in the Olympics would be an excellent showcase to help grow the sport further. However, it is right that the decision to add any new sport to the Olympic programme is a matter for the International Olympic Committee—the IOC. It would not be appropriate for the British Government, or any national Government, to become involved in that process, or to lobby for any particular sport's inclusion, especially given the varied sporting landscape that we enjoy in this country.

I am sure the hon. Lady will understand that lots of different sports lobby me to lobby other organisations. It is difficult to go along having a preference for one or another. It is right that we do not get involved and that it is an independent process, but that said, it is open to the relevant national governing body, along with the appropriate world governing body, to make a case for the inclusion of its sport. I understand that that may be under consideration for the 2024 Olympic games.

Nothing is guaranteed, and the incentive to be included on the Olympic programme is one that many sports may wish to aspire to. We are now just over two weeks away from the Rio games, which I am sure will be a wonderful spectacle for athletes and fans alike. In the debate last week, I said that the whole country would be right behind Team GB and indeed ParalympicsGB in Rio. Preparations over the past four years have gone well, with UK Sport working hard, alongside the British Olympic Association and the British Paralympic Association, to confirm Britain's position as one of the leading Olympic and Paralympic nations in the world. While competition in Rio will be strong, I know that our athletes are ready to give their all and make the country proud.

I can well understand why an exciting global sport like squash would wish to be included in this wonderful sporting panorama, reaching a global audience of billions and inspiring audiences at home. Squash has embraced innovation in recent years to make it a more televisual sport, and it is also in the lead on gender parity, along with other racket sports such as tennis. Indeed the success of the UK Sport-funded men's world championship held in Manchester in 2013 has resulted in the event again being awarded to the city. It will host the men's and women's world championships next year, which will further boost interest in the sport in this country.

The success of the 2014 Commonwealth games in Glasgow further demonstrated the strength of the sport in the home nations and its enduring popularity across the Commonwealth. There is a possibility that the Commonwealth Games will be held again in the UK in 2026. That would be another chance to promote the sport domestically while showcasing the UK's ability to host major events to a large international audience. It would also offer economic benefits to the nations.

Increased participation is vital to the lifeblood of any sport and helps to feed the elite level from a healthy grassroots base. That is why in December 2015 I published our new sport strategy, which puts increased participation

at the heart of the long-term direction of sport. The cross-departmental strategy will use sport to improve and measure the physical and mental wellbeing of people, as well as offering individual, social and community benefits and economic development. Although UK Sport does not fund squash currently, it supports the sport domestically in bidding for major events such as the world championships and in the field of international relations.

Home nations sports councils such as Sport England and Sport Wales also invest money in the sport at the grassroots level, encouraging participation and fostering talent. England Squash was awarded £13.5 million by Sport England for the four-year period of 2013 to 2017—£8.5 million for participation and £5 million for talent. Sport England's £5 million funds the talent pathway, supporting 4,000 young players aged 11 to 18, and the elite programme.

Great work is being done to encourage new players into the game and to address the recent decline in participation numbers. Squash 101 is a new programme to get more people playing—developed by England Squash and funded by Sport England—through group sessions. It delivers a fast-paced, intense workout without the need to play with a specific partner or within leagues. It includes formal and team challenges. Sessions are fun, informal and different every week. I suggest that that is how we do it in the all-party group to encourage more MPs to be active. They can come along and play a fun and innovative game of squash.

England Squash has also engaged with Sport England's successful "This Girl Can" campaign to deliver "Squash Girls Can". It is a fun beginners' session for women and girls. The sessions run for six to eight weeks, regardless of age or experience, and are a great introduction to squash. Sport England continues to discuss potential ways to develop facilities with local providers, such as those in my constituency, where they are exploring ways to develop facilities, including a temporary show court, which is extremely exciting. From the perspective of the hon. Member for Neath, I know that Sport Wales has also done its bit to encourage participation, coaching and elite performance in the Principality. It has two top 100 players in the men's and women's game.

There is certainly a case to be made that such an innovative and exciting sport should be able to grace the world's biggest stage, and the chance to win medals for Britain would of course be a popular outcome from the Sports Minister's perspective. However, the right and proper procedures must be followed to secure that global stage for squash, as with any other non-Olympic sport. Squash certainly has a strong case to make to the IOC, should it so choose. More widely, I assure the hon. Lady that the sport is healthy in this country. With the new sport strategy now in place, I expect that health to continue to improve and to deliver not only world-class performance internationally, but more opportunities across the country to enjoy playing this wonderful game.

4.25 pm

Question put and agreed to.

EU Referendum: UK-Ireland Border

4.30 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered implications of the UK leaving the EU for the UK-Ireland border.

It is a privilege to be able to move the motion for debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. The debate covers one of the many acute aspects of the decision by Britain to leave the European Union. It is one of the most acute for me.

The recent referendum result to leave the EU sent shockwaves right across the world, economically and politically. In my opinion, and in that of so many people, it was a bad decision taken for all the wrong reasons. In Ireland, we define a referendum as a process that gets the wrong answer to a question that was not asked in the first place. That seems to be a very appropriate definition of what has happened here.

I congratulate the Minister on his appointment and thank him for his generosity to me on many occasions in the past. I thank him for being here today and welcome him to his new post. I and others in my party will be seeking a meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to discuss all the issues involved in the aftermath of the referendum, but the future of the Irish border is a specific issue for which the Home Office has a particular responsibility. It is critical that the Home Office is fully engaged with the Northern Ireland Office, the parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government, on all the questions around the future status of the border.

The political, legal and economic complexities of a British exit from Europe are sobering, to say the least. The challenges that lie ahead will not be easy to surmount for Britain or Ireland, but they are particularly difficult for Northern Ireland. The effects of the vote for Britain to leave the EU are already being felt, with markets suffering and the sense of uncertainty turning off would-be foreign direct investors. The pound has lost almost a sixth of its value against the dollar. I have no intention of perpetuating “Project Fear”. Instead, I am asking myself how the delusions of “project fantasy” managed to persuade so many voters that leaving the EU would be truly in their best interests.

It is unfortunate that many of the key protagonists in the leave campaign have now jumped ship and absolved themselves from taking any responsibility whatever for the damage that I believe they have caused—but I am not surprised. When the size of the task at hand dawned on them and the result became clear, they seemed totally overwhelmed. They had no plan A, let alone a plan B. What has become patently clear is that the leave side did not believe for one moment that they would succeed. Secondly, they did not have any coherent plan for steering us through the very choppy seas of the UK in post-leave mode.

I do not claim to have all the answers to the uncertainty—I am struggling to find some as I go—but the uncertainty that we now face is worrying. I am determined to do all that I can to ensure that the economic and social damage to Northern Ireland, as a result of the intended withdrawal from the EU, is

minimised. After all, the majority of people living in Northern Ireland believe that the UK is better off in the EU—56% of them voted to remain.

During the EU referendum campaign, my colleagues and I in the Social Democratic and Labour party worked tirelessly to ensure that we had a high remain vote right across Northern Ireland. I have a particular sense of pride that my constituency had an excellent turnout, with more than 70% of those people voting to remain.

Personally, I have always thought that the EU is not perfect and requires much reform, but the reality is that if we were to dismantle the EU in the morning, we would have to find a new way of reinventing it the next day. People take all the benefits of the EU for granted and will only become fully aware of them when we have left. I urge our new Secretary of State to be cognisant of that fact, and fight, and fight again for the interests of people in Northern Ireland, to ensure that our unique circumstances are considered throughout the forthcoming negotiations. I believe that Northern Ireland’s interests cannot receive the full protection they deserve unless Northern Ireland has at least one, and preferably two, seats at the negotiating table as we go forward.

Prior to the referendum, at Prime Minister’s questions, I asked the former Prime Minister what assurances he could give us about the Irish border. I asked because many of my constituents were writing to me. They and I were deeply worried that there could be a return to a hard border and passport checks between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, which would be damaging to both parts of Ireland, economically and socially. In his response, the right hon. Gentleman warned of the checks along the Northern Ireland border with the Republic and of the possibility of people travelling from Belfast to other parts of the UK having to provide documentation in the event of an exit. The referendum result has created a major uncertainty about border controls and what they might look like. I welcome recent remarks by our new Secretary of State, who has said that there should be no border controls between the UK and the Republic of Ireland. On immigration and customs controls, there will be some changes.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): If we were not depressed before we came into this debate, we certainly will be now, listening to the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate him on obtaining the debate. Does he not accept that we are now not going to have the tanks and the guns and the barbed wire at the border? There is a new opportunity now for the United Kingdom as a whole to move forward and create a better country for the future of our young people, and to control our own destiny.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving us an example of “project fantasy” and the delusions associated with it. Those are the very delusions that we have put up with for a number of months, on the fairyland that was going to be created post-exit. The only thing he missed out on was telling us the tooth fairy is going to come round, and that Santa Claus is going to come round next week and give us all a bag of money.

I am not depressed or being depressed—I am looking quite simply at the facts. It may be a giggle for the Democratic Unionist party, but it is not a giggle for a lot of people. On the Sunday two days after the result

[*Dr Alasdair McDonnell*]

became obvious, I got 200 emails screaming at me—200 emails on a Sunday. I might normally get one email on a Sunday, if I am lucky, but I got 200, which were screaming at me and demanding to know what I was going to do about the mess that had been created. That is coming from the people I am elected to represent. Perhaps they have got it wrong—but I see no evidence of that. I see an awful lot of make-believe.

We have two or three simple options. If we do not have a hard border in customs and immigration terms, we have to have checks and controls at Larne, at the airports, and possibly even at Dublin, Dún Laoghaire and other places. An alternative option might be that the barriers are created somewhere about Dover and similar points of entry.

The issues, however, are serious, and make-believe and delusions will not help solve them. We will require a serious discussion with countries that remain in the European Union to ensure that we go forward with a positive agenda. That agenda will not be helped by delusions or aggression; it will require honest engagement and honest dealing with the facts.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate, because it is an interesting one, especially for those of us who live in Northern Ireland, as well as in the Republic of Ireland. I understand some of the concerns, but will he also acknowledge that since the exit referendum some people living in the Republic of Ireland have said that because “Things have settled down quite well and quickly in the United Kingdom,” perhaps it is time for those in the Republic of Ireland to reassess their position in the European Union? Some are saying, “Maybe we should have a referendum on our membership of the European Union as well.”

Dr McDonnell: I remind the hon. Gentleman that 56% of the people in Northern Ireland want to remain in the EU, and I guess that a significant number of those in southern Ireland would also want to remain. The referendum, frankly, was a mistake; it has opened a can of worms, which it will be difficult to sort out, and Britain will be much worse off at least economically, if not socially as well.

Remarks about what might, could or should happen are not a clear, definitive statement on, or a commitment to, what will happen. That clarity and assurance is why I asked for the debate today—we need clarity and the public want clarity. People are still in a degree of confusion. The vote has happened and stands, but an awful lot of the detail is missing.

Never before have Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland had a situation in which one is in the EU and the other outside it. Also, references to the common travel area simply do not cut any ice with me. We are in uncharted seas—circumstances we have never been in before—and the prospect of people undergoing passport checks as they move between the north and the south, or between Northern Ireland and Britain, is extremely concerning. It would be unwise to create obstacles to the free and seamless travel that now exists between north and south, and between Ireland and Britain, and

which is critical for cross-border workers, students, traders and all the social networks that exist at all levels between Northern Ireland and the Republic.

Queen’s University Belfast is in my constituency, and students from Northern Ireland move to the south, to Dublin and other places, such as Galway and Cork, for university education—vice versa, students from the south travel to Belfast, Coleraine and Derry. The practicalities of how changes to the border will impact on them as individuals, and more widely on our economy, have not been fully assessed, and they need to be assessed and fully considered.

The EU referendum result cannot be allowed to erode the massive progress in benefits over the past 20 years, especially the good work of the peace process and the benefits that have flowed from the Good Friday agreement—or the Belfast agreement, as some might wish to call it—including the political process that has evolved; and that still has some way to go. Many of my colleagues have a living memory of a hard border across Ireland. It is not a good memory by any means. On the crucial issue of the border, however, I stress to the Minister that we need a post-Brexit situation for Britain and Europe to resemble the pre-Brexit situation as closely as possible. We want to minimise the damage and disadvantages that can arise.

Free movement of people has transformed the island of Ireland, and it is a central tenet of the Good Friday agreement. That agreement is rooted in European legislation and set in a broad European framework. A UK exit from the EU risks severely compromising the 1998 settlement. There is potential for erosion of its terms and benefits for all if and when Britain leaves the EU. The prospect of an exit has also brought us huge legal and financial uncertainty. Further uncertainty around what the border will look like in 10 years’ time leaves us vulnerable to those who would seek to take advantage of that uncertainty and our weakened state, including dissidents and other paramilitaries—that is not a threat, but an observation.

No one present wants to see a return to the darker days that we came through, but we must be aware of the delicate balance in Northern Ireland, the unique political settlement we have there and how it became destabilised after the referendum. Dragging a region that voted solidly to remain in the EU out of the EU—against its wishes—flies in the face of the principle of consent, which is at the very heart of the 1998 settlement. The new Home Secretary, the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister for Justice, Frances Fitzgerald, must work closely on the issue to ensure that all concerns to do with the border are resolved in a functional and effective way that secures safety, and with it the freedom of all our citizens, north and south, in Ireland.

On customs and the border, leaving the customs union would necessitate customs checks on the border and, therefore, significant restrictions on, barriers to or limitations on travel at the border. We need to look seriously at an option for Northern Ireland to have a special customs status, whereby it is treated as being in the customs union for goods and services travelling solely within the island of Ireland. There are many precedents, but the one that comes to mind is Büsingen, a small German town on the Swiss border, which is treated as part of Switzerland for customs purposes. All

sorts of options are available, with other places having various arrangements, but that is one example. It is essential, for our small businesses trading across the Irish border, that we remain within the customs union, and for our exporters, that we remain in the single market.

Throughout Northern Ireland, 56% of our electorate voted to remain. The democratic will of the people in Northern Ireland cannot and should not be airbrushed out of the debate. Northern Ireland can, and might well have to, make common cause with Scotland and Gibraltar. I am looking carefully, along with others in Northern Ireland, at establishing an effort to discuss how we steer our way through the problems that exist already and that will present themselves—for Northern Ireland especially—in the future.

I sincerely hope that the EU will look at some kind of special access arrangement for Northern Ireland, given its unique constitutional status and its geographical location. All sorts of special EU arrangements are in place for the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and a series of French dependencies throughout the world. The needs of our people and the future of our children depend on our getting the post-Brexit situation right, and doing everything we can to reduce the adverse consequences of Britain leaving the European Union. Our peace, security and economic prospects are in the balance. My plea to those present in Westminster Hall is to get this right—let us do everything necessary to ensure that the post-Brexit situation is minimally removed from the pre-Brexit situation.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate is due to finish at 5.30 pm. I shall call the first of the Front Benchers to speak at 5.7 pm. The Scottish National party has five minutes, Her Majesty's Opposition five minutes and the Minister 10 minutes, and then Dr Alasdair McDonnell has three minutes at the end to sum up the debate. Five people are standing, so I am afraid it will be a time limit of three minutes each, if we are all to get in—

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP) *indicated dissent*.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): The hon. Lady from the Social Democratic and Labour party had withdrawn voluntarily, so that is four Members to speak. We will go for a time limit of four minutes. Sammy Wilson will be the first to show us how it is done.

4.50 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): You have probably chosen the wrong person to do that, Mr Hollobone, but thank you for calling me to speak. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

Despite the fact that we have blue skies outside and are probably experiencing a heatwave, the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) has brought clouds of doom and downpours of gloom to this room today. May I say just three things? First, he has made a big play of the fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU, but the important

thing is that the majority of people in the United Kingdom, in a United Kingdom referendum, voted to leave the EU.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman said that we are already experiencing the shockwaves from that vote. Given that since the day the referendum result was announced, we have had an outpouring of efforts to talk the economy down by the bad losers in this debate, it is surprising that the economy and other things have not been far worse. Let us look at some of the rays of sunlight that are already coming through the gloom that he has brought in today. The biggest investment in financial services by a far eastern company—£24 billion—has been announced this week. Already, Australia, America, New Zealand and other countries are talking about new trade agreements. And rather than jumping ship as he said they were, some of the people who were at the forefront of the referendum debate are now in the lead. They are at the helm of the ship, and I have no doubt that it will be steered to a safe haven.

Thirdly, let me deal with the border, which was one of the scare stories used by those who tried to persuade people in Northern Ireland that leaving the EU was not in their interests. We have heard the same rhetoric today, but there is no substance to it. Here are the facts. The Irish Government have said they do not wish to have border controls. The British Government have said they do not wish to have border controls. The Northern Ireland Assembly has said it does not wish to have border controls. Historically, the common travel area has worked effectively and ensures that there is no need for border controls. The Irish Government chose not to be part of the Schengen arrangements. Why? Because they value the free movement of people between Northern Ireland, the rest of the UK and the Irish Republic.

Why would the Irish Government wish to open their doors and allow people freely to move into the Irish Republic, hoping that if they were economic immigrants, they might move on to the United Kingdom, or if they were coming in to do terrorist deeds, they would not do those deeds in the Irish Republic? It is in the interests of the Irish Government to do checks at ports of entry. Indeed, they already do them, and I believe that that is possible. When the previous Government—the spokesman for the Labour party, the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), may accept this—talked about e-borders, the first thing they did was to negotiate with the Irish Republic about how the e-borders arrangements for the United Kingdom could effectively be policed at points of entry into the Irish Republic, and the Irish Republic Government showed a willingness to do that and to work with those arrangements. We have had such checks historically, and I believe that we can negotiate to ensure that those stay in place.

4.54 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) on securing the debate and his leadership on this important issue more widely.

Contrary to what we have just heard from the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), several serious concerns and questions have arisen since the Brexit outcome, and those have been addressed by people

[*Mark Durkan*]

looking at these issues. He seems to blur and conflate the questions of a customs border, a migration border, the common travel area and the free movement of goods. Those things are distinct and should not be conflated. We had the common travel area in circumstances in which we still had customs borders and controls, and various exchange controls.

Committee B—the European affairs committee—of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, which met in Malahide in the aftermath of the referendum, commissioned a report on visa systems. It is a very good report, and I commend it to the Minister, who has just taken up his post. If he wants a good understanding of the true history of the common travel area—without the false assumptions and impressions that are given, as though the area has had a singular, linear and even history, which it has not—he would do well to read that report. I pay tribute to that committee's two current rapporteurs, Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD, who represents Sinn Féin in the Dáil, and Baroness Harris from the other House. Her predecessor as rapporteur was Lord German. The report is a very thorough investigation of the issues.

In case other hon. Members care to know this, the committee is chaired by the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), who was not in the alarmist camp in relation to the leave prospectus. The report states that

“as already noted, the Committee is not currently in a position to draw clear conclusions or make recommendation on the implications for the CTA of the UK leaving the EU. The Committee therefore hopes to explore this issue in more detail as part of any future inquiries it holds on the wider implications for British-Irish relations of the UK's vote to leave the EU.”

Committee B will not be the only committee of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly to look at those issues, but it would be wrong of anybody to pretend that there are not issues or that my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South is trying to conjure up or exaggerate some of these problems.

Tom Elliott: I hear an acceptance, at least, from both the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) that the UK's withdrawal from the European Union will be implemented. We are now talking about how that will be done and the mechanisms for doing that.

Mark Durkan: We are talking about the implications of the referendum result—a referendum, remember, that we were told at the time was constitutionally advisory. Let us be very clear that the people of Northern Ireland voted clearly to remain in the EU. They did so when they voted in the referendum, and they did so previously when they voted for the Good Friday agreement, which took the UK and Ireland's common membership of the EU as a given. That is written into the fabric of the agreement between the two Governments; it is there in the preamble and it is there in strand 1, strand 2 and strand 3. That agreement itself depended on the principle of consent—the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, as well as the consent of the people of the south—and that consent was binding. It is a bit much for people to say that the rest of us should take it as a matter of passing lightness that Northern Ireland could

be taken out of the EU against the clear wishes of its people and with potential damage to the Good Friday agreement.

Remember that, as well as the European Union being written into the Good Friday agreement, so too was the European convention on human rights, and we know that there are people in Government who want to dispose of that as well. Those are not mere stud walls to be knocked through but supporting walls of the institutions that we have and the Good Friday agreement, which was given democratic legitimacy—it is a democratic high-water mark—by the unique and overwhelming endorsement that it received from the people of Ireland, north and south, in 1998. No one has dared to contest that since. Those are not matters that we should in any way take as given.

Those who are now grinning like horses chewing thistles because they have got the leave result that they wanted cannot pretend that there are not issues and complications. The rest of us want to minimise and mitigate those, and ensure that people in Northern Ireland are in the best position. It is clear from what my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South said that that is what we are doing. We are looking for flexibility and a space that allows us to maintain access to the EU and its benefits, which a majority of people in Northern Ireland voted to retain.

4.59 pm

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) on making the debate possible as this issue has been debated across these islands. I welcome the Minister to his new position. For the record, I declare an interest, in that I am an officer of the all-party group on the Irish in Britain. I speak in the debate not only as an MP representing a Scottish constituency with a large Irish diaspora but as someone with Irish grandparents—a common occurrence for those of us in the west of Scotland.

From a Scottish perspective, during the European Union referendum campaign, the messages those of us on the remain side from across the usual party political divide conveyed were of the many economic and social benefits of being a member of the European Union and how best our country and our people can interact with our neighbours across that Union. Critically, free movement of people and goods are, and continue to be, important benefits, and ones that affect many of my constituents. I have no doubt that that was one of the contributing factors that led to such a large vote to remain, not only in my constituency but across the nation of Scotland.

The status of EU nationals living in this country must be urgently addressed to reassure those living, working and paying their taxes that their future is secure. While the issues facing Scotland and the status of EU nationals can be appreciated in Northern Ireland, the fact that the Province shares a border with a European Union country opens up a new layer of complex issues.

Ms Ritchie: On that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the free movement of goods, services and people is vital to a sound economic base on the island of Ireland, both north and south, and also between Ireland and Britain?

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I could not agree more with the hon. Lady, as access to a stable economy creates stable communities. As I said, while the EU nationals issue can be appreciated in Northern Ireland, the fact that the Province shares a border with a European country opens up a new layer of complex issues, involving local businesses, communities and the people themselves that needs to be addressed. The situation brings challenges for both the Irish and United Kingdom Governments as well as for the Northern Ireland Executive. A coherent strategy across all three must be in place to meet the issues that arise from the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union. The impact of Brexit on the Good Friday agreement is still unclear. The United Kingdom Government must address the concerns that any possible hardening of the border will have a detrimental impact on the protections contained in the Good Friday agreement.

The second piece of legislation I will touch on is the common travel area. There are provisions outlined in that long-standing agreement that Irish citizens have a special place and status in UK law which is separate to and predates the rights they have as European Union citizens. I believe, as I hope the Minister does, that the common travel area is of the utmost importance in the positive working relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Will the Minister reaffirm what the UK Government's view is on the CTA and whether they intend to seek legal advice on how Brexit will impact on the legislation? In addition, will he advise whether the previous review of citizenship legislation in 2008 that called into question Irish citizen rights in the United Kingdom will re-emerge? Has consideration been given to amending or repealing the Ireland Act 1949?

It must be acknowledged that the majority of the people of Northern Ireland, like the sovereign nation of Scotland, voted to remain in the European Union, and that the United Kingdom Government must listen to those voices and take them seriously. Therefore, I would ask that the Government include the Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Executive every step of the way in this process, critically in relation to the border arrangements with the Irish Republic.

5.4 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) South for bringing this important issue for debate. Despite the somewhat negative view, we must look at Northern Ireland and where we are. There are two sides to this very honest debate between those who feel that Brexit will create problems and those who feel that it will create opportunities. I am one of those guys who thinks that we can get lots of opportunities out of this. That is the point of view from which I see it, and that is where I will come from.

As an example, tourism is one of Northern Ireland's great success stories over the last period of time. The economy has grown on the back of tourism as well as many other things, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) said. Tourism revenue rose to £325 million, with some 2.1 million visitors in a year. Many of those visitors come from the Republic of Ireland up, and they come through customs in the Republic of Ireland. Whatever the system of agreed

custom controls may be between Northern Ireland and the Republic, is there anything to say that they will not come through that? There is nothing whatsoever. If they have made the effort to come to Ireland and to come north, they will do the same again. I do not see any reasons why that should not continue.

We have had some high-profile events, including the £77 million Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway visitor centre, and the Gran Fondo Giro d'Italia took place in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson). There are cruise liners to Ulster shores that come regularly down to Strangford—to Mount Stewart, to Greyabbey and down the Ards peninsula—to explore. Lots of people come to take advantage of that and I cannot see that changing; why would that change?

Another area of cross-border connectivity is Northern Ireland's electrical grid. Let us look at some of the connections we already have. There are three cross-border interconnectors with the Republic of Ireland. The main one, between Tandragee and Louth, has a capacity of 1,200 MW. We are also connected to the national grid of the island of Great Britain by the Moyle interconnector. Those are just two examples of connections between the two nations. We also have interconnector gas pipelines with the Republic's gas supplier, Bord Gáis, which provides gas directly.

Those are things that are working and I do not see any reason why they would not happen, because all of those involved have good economic relations. That connection has been in place since 2005 when the gas company from down south made its first connection, with others in 2006 and 2007.

There are people who use the route across to access the Republic of Ireland for jobs and those who come shopping. Is there anything to indicate that those things will not continue? People will still come across the border to work and they will still come across to shop regularly.

Sometimes we need to look at some of the things that have happened. One of my constituents witnessed a people-smuggling operation coming back from Dublin to Belfast. He contacted the Garda Síochána and the guards arrested 50 people, who were taken away in Transit vans. There is an example of what can work because two countries want to see the system working. Criminal gangs and illegal migrants may attempt to use Northern Ireland as a route into the rest of the United Kingdom, but that is an issue that can and will be addressed.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim mentioned customs. Vehicle recognition makes it easier to travel between Belfast and Dublin and it is very possible that that can continue. The Secretary of State will try to get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland and I believe that we can have that.

Ms Ritchie: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Jim Shannon: No. I welcome the fact that the devolved regions are to be given a voice in that process and I am confident that the Northern Ireland Executive will stand up for Northern Ireland in that to ensure that Northern Ireland outside of the EU will be an outstanding success.

5.8 pm

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I welcome the Minister to his new portfolio—I am sure it will not be a boring time for him. I thank the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) for bringing this very important debate to the House, because it is our friends and neighbours in Northern Ireland who may be facing the greatest uncertainty from the vote to leave the EU. The 56% vote across Northern Ireland to remain has been mentioned and, with the prospect of a hardening border with Ireland, there will be many disappointed souls across the Irish sea. As the hon. Gentleman said, the referendum has certainly provided the wrong answer to a question that was not wanted in the first place.

I appreciate that some steps have already been taken to address issues around the common travel area.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) on securing the debate. Does she agree that there is an urgent need on the part of the Government to provide guarantees about the common travel area and the free movement of goods, services and people on the island of Ireland, which is central to our economy and pivotal to it?

Deidre Brock: I thank the hon. Lady for bringing up those points, which I will certainly address in my speech.

I appreciate that some steps have been taken to address those issues. The new Secretary of State, in a written answer last week, told me that senior civil servants from the UK and Ireland have already met to discuss it and to plan a way ahead. That is heartening news that is much to be welcomed, because, as I think everyone recognises, the damaging effects of a hard border on the economy of Northern Ireland would be substantial. However, as the hon. Lady, the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) highlighted in their excellent speeches, even if the CTA is protected, the free movement of goods around the island and across the border will remain an issue of contention and of extreme importance to the economies either side of that border.

I applaud the Irish Government's moves to try to get some answers on the issue ahead of the Brexit negotiations—particularly the Taoiseach's attempts to persuade the German Chancellor of the importance of the issue. I also appreciate that the Chancellor was not in a position to give any assurances and that she will hold her counsel until we are deep into negotiations. Will the Minister give us any indication that the Government are taking the issue seriously, and perhaps give some indication on whether there is likely to be any discussion with the Stormont Executive and with the Irish Government about the free movement of goods as well as the free movement of people? Has the Minister discussed with the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union the special circumstances in Northern Ireland? Have the legacy issues been raised with the Brexit ministerial team, so that the issues are clear in their mind when they go into negotiations with the EU?

On the comments by Enda Kenny at the MacGill Summer School in Donegal about a possible border poll, is the Secretary of State talking to the Irish Government about that possibility? I understand he is opposed to such a poll and has been clear that he will not call it, but there are circumstances, delineated in the Good Friday agreement, that would force him to. Will the Minister tell us whether contingency planning is taking place for all of the possible outcomes of that nudge towards a poll? For example, does he support the convening of a council of all concerned, so that it can be discussed around a table rather than in newspaper headlines?

The Secretary of State is only a few days into the job and it will not be an easy place to occupy for the foreseeable future—I almost feel sorry for him—but we need to get running. The important consideration in all of this will be the people. How does this affect the people of Northern Ireland and how does it affect their ability to make an income? The people and the economy will have to be front and centre all the way through this and we need to hear clear and definite responses from the ministerial team on how they intend to take this forward, what immediate plans they have and where they think the arrows are pointing. As the hon. Member for Belfast South said, “the detail is missing”. As I said earlier, I welcome the Minister to the job and look forward to hearing his answers.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I call the Opposition's longest-serving spokesman, Stephen Pound.

5.12 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I knew I would achieve something of note one day, Mr Hollobone; I had rather hoped for something of a little more significance, but I will take what I can get. Despite that, it is an absolute delight and a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. I join the general chorus of approbation in congratulating the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) on bringing this crucial matter before the House.

This will not be the last such discussion we have. I see many years ahead of this sort of detailed discussion. There is absolutely no doubt whatever that we will be discussing this, probably to the exclusion of almost all other business in the House, certainly over the next two years. Equally, if anyone thinks for a moment that the history of Ireland somehow means that there will not be a border—be that a hard border, a soft border, a customs border, a tariff border, or the possibility of a physical border from Derry to Dundalk, as per Enda Kenny's comments—that does not matter; there will be a border. This will be a division between two separate countries. There will be a border, and whether it can be defined in the boreens or whether there will be border posts or customs posts does not matter; it will be a border.

There is an idea that this country can go to Brussels or Strasbourg and negotiate, when in fact all we can do is to seek clarification. There cannot be a negotiation when one party has decided to leave a relationship. We will not negotiate or sit and divide up the CDs. It is not like a marriage breaking up, it is one country that has made the decision to leave a group of 28. That is the reality. The hon. Member for Belfast South rightly

raised the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland. I think the Minister—I have confidence in him—is going to have to accept that there is a unique circumstance here, and it is not just about the common travel area. I pressed the then Home Secretary, now the Prime Minister, on this subject two or three weeks ago and she was reassuring on the continuation of the CTA. It certainly requires major legislation for it to be amended, and I am hopeful about that.

When the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott) gets to his feet, a smile normally breaks across my face because I know that something good is going to emerge. As someone who enjoyed his hospitality, his good fellowship and his generosity of spirit in Maguiresbridge for the Twelfth celebrations, it is always a pleasure to see him, but today he set running another hare I had never heard of before. He is encouraging the Republic of Ireland to have its own referendum on moving away and to completely destroy this marvellous creation, this European Union, this great pride of civilisation that we have. He is encouraging our brothers, our sisters, our cousins, our neighbours, and in many cases our family members in the Republic of Ireland, to do what we have so foolishly done in this country—to turn our back on the security and safety of Europe. I rather hope that, when the word reaches Dublin that the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone has spoken, they will respectfully pay attention but decide not to go along with his advice on this occasion.

What can one say of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson)? A meteorological overview of this whole matter, seen through the weather forecast in Larne, is always something to be treasured, but in his search for sunlight in this particular case he was avoiding the reality. There are dark clouds over Northern Ireland relating to this matter; the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) raised the north-south aspect of that. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) talked about the interconnector. That is yet another issue; there are so many that we need to discuss. I particularly look to the Minister for assurance on things like the European arrest warrant. Of the 50 EAW applications made between 2004 and 2012, 30 were made from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland. We need to know what the protocols for the European arrest warrant are.

I mentioned the joy of meeting the farming community in Maguiresbridge the other day. Do not forget that £1.2 billion of EU funding was to go to farming and agriculture in Northern Ireland between 2014 and 2020. I admire any group of people who care so much for the sanctity of their nation and for the proud privilege of wishing to stand on their own they would say no to £1.2 billion. My constituents would take a somewhat sanguine view of that, but I am encouraged by the self-sacrifice of the Fermanagh farmers.

There are many other issues that we need to discuss. Above all, we are faced with the reality that there will be some sort of border. We need to discuss that and go through it in detail, and we have started that process today. It will not finish for a long time, even after article 50 has been triggered. I am not saying I am looking forward to spending many hours in the company of the people in this Chamber, but I know I will and I know that it has to be done.

5.17 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I am not sure if you spent the weekend waiting for the phone to ring from No. 10, but the Government's loss is this Chamber's gain.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast South (Dr McDonnell) on securing a debate on this important matter and I thank him for his kind words. Like him, I was on the remain side, but as the Prime Minister said, "Brexit means Brexit". I spoke with the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland only this week. As my predecessor in this job, he offered me a few words of advice—I offered him a few words of advice about the delights of the Ulster fry—and he made it absolutely clear to me that he is 100% committed to serving the people of Ulster.

The border is not just about the movement of people, it is also about the flow of goods, services and trade. It is about allowing the people of the United Kingdom and Ireland to live and work closely together. The arrangements with Ireland have their roots in the political, cultural, social and economic ties between the UK and Ireland, and the EU referendum result does not and should not change that. The UK has always been an open and outward-looking country and a great global trading nation, and that is what we intend to continue to be. It is important to understand that we are still members of the EU, and nothing has changed in the way our people can travel, in the way our goods can move or in the way our services can be sold, including across the border with Ireland and to the common travel area. I welcome trucks from the Republic of Ireland travelling on the roads of Northern Ireland, not least because they are paying the HGV levy, which helps to defray the cost of maintaining and modernising those particular roads. That was actually one of my ideas when I worked in the Department for Transport.

The common travel area arrangement predates the EU, and we remain committed to it. The Prime Minister spoke with the Taoiseach last Wednesday underlining that commitment. We have the full support of the Irish Government in working with us to preserve that arrangement during the negotiation of the UK's exit from the EU, and work is already under way.

Since 1922, the position of Irish citizens in the UK and the citizens of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in Ireland has been unique. Nationals of each country are treated virtually identically to citizens, with an openness of travel between the two states. The absence of immigration controls has been commonplace since that date. We want to protect the principle of free, unhindered travel between Ireland and the United Kingdom—both north-south and east-west. Our relationship with Ireland is special and it should remain so. Air passenger numbers between Ireland and the UK are 10 million to 12 million a year, and passenger ferries between Ireland and Great Britain carry around 2.8 million passengers per year. However, the border is not just about the movement of people; it is also about the flow of goods, services and trade. We want to protect and enhance those benefits. Bilateral trade in both directions between Ireland and the UK is worth more than €60 billion a year. The UK is Ireland's biggest trading partner.

The significance of the common travel area arrangement is perhaps felt most keenly at the land border between

[*Mr Robert Goodwill*]

Northern Ireland and Ireland—a border more than 270 miles long that meanders across the island of Ireland, cutting across some 180 roads and covering all types of terrain. On a relatively short journey, the border can be crossed several times. A considerable number of border crossings each day are undertaken by British and Irish citizens going about their daily lives. On average, there are nearly 17,000 daily vehicle crossings across the land border. In 2014, it is estimated that 13,200 long-term migrants arrived in Northern Ireland from Ireland and 10,500 moved in the opposite direction. The border today is invisible, with substantial cross-border movement and increasing business, cultural and economic links—all of which is good. A return to customs points, passport checks and a hard border would be a critical economic issue for Northern Ireland and is not wanted by any. All political parties in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government share a vision of peace and prosperity.

The common travel area arrangement was preserved when the UK and Ireland joined the European Union, and we will look to preserve it again, now that the UK is negotiating to leave. We will be looking to preserve the position recognised by the protocols to the European Union treaties—namely, that the UK and Ireland

“may continue to make arrangements between themselves relating to the movement of persons between their territories”.

We share with Ireland an objective of preserving the common travel area and an open border on the island of Ireland, working together to avoid the imposition of hard border controls. For his part, the Taoiseach has been very clear that he wants to minimise any possible disruption to the flow of people, goods and services across the border. Indeed, I hope to have an early meeting with the Tánaiste to underline the importance of continued co-operation.

At a senior officials meeting in Dublin the week after the referendum, it was agreed that the UK and Ireland would work together on priority areas within the British-Irish relationship in the forthcoming negotiations on the future relationship between the UK and the EU. Three priority areas identified were: the common travel area and borders and customs issues; Northern Ireland and north-south issues; and bilateral security co-operation. The Government will ensure that the interests of all parts of the UK are protected and advanced as preparations are made for a new negotiation with the EU, protecting what the Prime Minister has called the “precious bond” between England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and between “every one of us”. Maintaining the long tradition of operational co-operation will be an important element of ongoing UK-Ireland collaboration to secure and strengthen the common travel area and to prevent the imposition of UK border controls.

Mark Durkan: I note what the Minister has said about developing and strengthening the common travel area. Of course, the common travel area does not apply in terms of visas for visitors coming in from outside Britain and Ireland, except for Chinese and Indian visitors. Will he, in his new role, look at ensuring that similar flexibility can be available to people such as the Chernobyl children who visit on a charity basis? They are not allowed to come in from Donegal to avail themselves of offers of swimming or bowling in a place

like Derry because they need a separate UK visa. Similarly, visa systems mean that refugees from Syria who are on either side of the border, with some in Letterkenny and some in Derry, are not allowed to cross the border to meet one another.

Mr Goodwill: Those are all areas we can review. Indeed, they may well be a central part of the negotiations. The UK now has to raise its horizons to a global level. Travel and trade between the big trading blocs in the world are opportunities we must take. I commend the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) for the passion with which he spoke about the opportunities of Brexit and not just the Private Frazer doom and gloom we have heard from some others in the debate.

We must continue to protect our borders and the public from the threat posed to both the UK and Ireland from criminals and terrorists who may seek to enter the common travel area and do harm. There is a considerable amount of joint working and shared policy between common travel area members to secure the CTA external border—for example, investment in border processes; increased data sharing to inform immigration and border security decisions; interoperable passenger data systems; and harmonised visa policy and processes.

At the end of March, Ireland passed legislation that allows the UK to require carriers to provide advance passenger information on UK-Ireland journeys where collected by the carrier. A joint British-Irish visa scheme is an innovative scheme that shows just what can be achieved when the UK and Ireland work together in our shared interest. The scheme currently allows Indian and Chinese nationals who are issued visit visas for one country to also visit the other. That promotes tourism in both countries and is an important and expanding part of the Northern Ireland economy, which we are keen to see grow further.

Preparations for the negotiations to leave the EU must involve all the devolved Administrations, to ensure that the interests of all parts of the United Kingdom are properly taken into account. The UK Government are committed to working with the devolved Administrations as we prepare for a new negotiation with the EU.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: Given the commitment to work with the devolved Administrations, will the British Government commit to support Irish citizens who have more or less equal rights to be in the United Kingdom? Will those rights remain? The Minister has skipped over that dramatically.

Mr Goodwill: There are a number of rights that existed before we joined the European Union. Those treaties are still in place, and there is no reason to suspect that there will be any threat to that particular situation.

The common travel area is a product of its unique historical, geographical and political context, evolving over time in a pragmatic way to meet the changing needs of society. That tradition of co-operation and the regard shown for the interests of all parts of the common travel area and the UK should continue now. Our objective for the common travel area as we enter negotiations with the EU on the UK's departure is clear: to protect the arrangement for future generations

of British and Irish citizens, cognisant of our shared identity and history. The Government will continue to work with Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive in particular to see how best, collectively, we can work not only to maintain the common travel area but to enhance further the opportunities and strengthen our collective capability to protect our borders and the public from harm.

5.27 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell: Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for your great courtesy to all of us. May I also thank the Minister for his extensive reply? It is but the beginning.

Ms Ritchie: Does my hon. Friend agree that we are now in a unique situation in that Northern Ireland is being taken against our will out of the European Union while the other part of the island—Ireland—will remain part of it? That is the issue that presents difficulty for us.

Dr McDonnell: I agree with my colleague that there is potentially a pulling apart and a disconnect here; I certainly share that anxiety. We should all work and do all we can to ensure that this does not do too much damage.

My point is that if we fail to plan, we plan to fail. This situation has to be managed meticulously, in the

finer detail. My sense over the last week was that in the light of the referendum, there were little or no plans in Whitehall. I mean no disrespect to anybody, because the vote to leave was not the expected result, but there was no negotiation strategy. There was not even a negotiating team.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr McDonnell: Sorry, I only have 30 seconds. There was no negotiating team and very few with the experience required. The same situation applied in Brussels, where there was no plan A, never mind a plan B. There are various attitudes among the 27 member states left towards Britain and the divorce. Negotiations can work if they are approached constructively and positively, but aggression and insults can be counterproductive. I thank my colleagues the hon. Members for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) and for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan)—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statement

Tuesday 19 July 2016

HOME DEPARTMENT

Community Sponsorship

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The refugee resettlement programme team is a tri-departmental team, based in the Home Office. This reflects the cross cutting nature of the resettlement programme. This written statement has been prepared by officials from the joint team and agreed by both myself and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

The response of the British public to the refugee crisis resulting from the conflict in Syria has been one of overwhelming generosity, and many have been moved to make offers of assistance. At the Conservative party conference, the then Home Secretary said that we would build on offers of support to develop a community sponsorship scheme to allow individuals, charities, faith groups, churches and businesses to support refugees directly.

I am pleased to announce today details of how the Government will empower local communities to support the most vulnerable refugees through community sponsorship. This includes a “Help Refugees in the UK” digital register of offers from the public, and a scheme for full community sponsorship.

The “Help Refugees in the UK” register, hosted on the gov.uk website, will make it easier for the public to support vulnerable refugees in the UK. Local authorities will be able to identify the goods and services that they require to support refugees, individuals will then be able to submit their offers, and the system will channel them to the areas where they are going to be used. “Help Refugees in the UK” is being launched in nine pilot local authorities initially. They are Broxtowe, Cambridge, Cornwall, Coventry, Gateshead, Lambeth, City of Nottingham, Wiltshire, and City of York. Offers of help made by members of the public in all non-pilot

areas will be considered centrally by the resettlement programme team before being passed on to local authorities. In Scotland, offers of support will be directed to the “Scotland Welcomes Refugees” website through a link on the gov.uk website.

The full community sponsorship scheme will enable community groups to take on the challenging but rewarding role of welcoming and supporting a refugee family in the UK. Full community sponsorship will commence on a small scale, and the resettled families will be among those referred by the UNHCR under the Syrian resettlement and vulnerable children’s resettlement schemes.

Accordingly, a ministerial arrangement under paragraph 1(d) of schedule 23 to the Equality Act 2010 has been made to allow a community sponsorship scheme for vulnerable Syrians resettled in the UK. I am placing a copy of the arrangement for this concession in the Library of both Houses of Parliament.

Community sponsors will be responsible for supporting the resettled family from the moment of their arrival in the UK. This will include, for example, meeting the family at the airport, giving a warm welcome and explaining UK and local culture, providing housing, helping them register with medical and social services, arranging English language tuition, and supporting them towards employment and self-sufficiency.

Supporting a vulnerable resettled family is a significant responsibility. The Home Office will approve every sponsoring organisation. The approval process will ensure that each prospective sponsor has sufficient resources—housing, financial and personnel; has a credible plan for supporting a resettled family, backed by relevant experience; and does not present a risk to the resettled family.

In order to develop the scheme, the Government have been working with a number of prospective sponsors and local authorities. Lambeth Palace are the first community group to be approved and receive a Syrian family.

Guidance on how to become a community sponsor will be published on the gov.uk website today. This is an exciting and ground-breaking new development for resettlement in the UK. I hope that this new approach will help bring communities together and support these often traumatised and vulnerable families as they rebuild their lives, and contribute to and thrive in our country.

[HCWS95]

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