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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 16 November 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 16 November 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Sahel/Northern Nigeria**

1. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What recent assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in the Sahel and northern Nigeria. [907173]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel):** This year we have significantly increased our support, providing a further £80 million of humanitarian aid to support more than 9 million people affected across the region. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are working to tackle poverty and the crisis in the region at source, rather than waiting for the consequences to reach us domestically.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** There are more than 2.6 million displaced people in the area, 6.4 million people are facing food insecurity, and a public health emergency has been declared in four countries, together with the Central African Republic, in response to a polio outbreak, yet United Nations appeals are only one third funded or less. What more can the UK Government do to bring this crisis to the world's attention?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to an appalling situation facing the region, and more must be done to meet the humanitarian needs. The UN needs that help to increase its capacity and develop. As to what more can be done, we encourage Governments across the world in the donor community to step up their contributions, just as we have, because the humanitarian response required must be funded now. With my hon. Friend and with the UK Government, we are challenging everyone to step up and do more.

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Government's additional £80 million committed at the UN General Assembly for the humanitarian crisis. This goes some way towards addressing the imbalance between development assistance and humanitarian aid. However, relief agencies are unable to reach up to 2 million people in north-east Nigeria. Can the Minister provide an update on how her Department is leading an effective, strong UN-led response while also ensuring

that DFID funding goes to a range of actors, including by channelling more funding bilaterally through non-Government organisations?

**Priti Patel:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising the issue. She is right. In addition to addressing the emergency humanitarian needs, DFID is investing in partnership working—yes, at a bilateral level, but also through the multilateral organisations that we are working with. Long-term resilience, support and capacity building are required. Our humanitarian programme is laying the foundations for these long-term outcomes through, for example, social transfers and access to health services, and importantly, focusing on the right interventions that can both help in the long term and provide the emergency relief required now.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): The UK has excellent links through the Anglican Communion to the Churches in Nigeria. Would the Secretary of State welcome the willingness of the Churches to help with the humanitarian situation to address some of the underlying causes, particularly corruption?

**Priti Patel:** My right hon. Friend is right about the power and the support of the Anglican community and Churches in Nigeria in particular. We have to work with grassroots organisations and religious organisations as well. We welcome the support and the focus on capacity building in particular, and the awareness-raising that is required on many of these challenging issues.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): Aid without security in northern Nigeria is meaningless. I welcome the deployment of British troops to support the Nigerians in the north-east. Will the Secretary of State review official development assistance rules to make sure that that type of deployment is ODA-eligible for the people of northern Nigeria?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend will be clear about ODA rules from his previous role in the Foreign Office. He highlights the importance of a united and strategic approach, which can be seen in the UK's work to support the Nigerian Government in their overall undertaking. The cross-Government work that is taking place is the right approach to tackle the severe issues that Nigeria is trying to cope with.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): Looking at the immunisation of children in northern Nigeria, it appears that the coverage is very thin. In the past, some of the figures for coverage have been shown to be completely false. Can the Department work with the Government of Nigeria to ensure that there is total transparency, and work more with NGOs to ensure that more children are immunised throughout northern Nigeria?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right about the importance of immunising children. I recognise the outstanding work that the agencies undertake in very difficult conditions as they try to reach communities to immunise children. More data and more transparency are needed, and we are driving much of that data transparency requirement through the support that we provide to organisations on the ground delivering those vital immunisations.

### Education (Girls)

2. **Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to support education for girls in the developing world. [907174]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (James Wharton):** Providing education for girls is a priority for this Government and this Department. In the last Parliament, we helped over 5 million girls to get the education that they need and deserve. In this Parliament we continue that work. The girls' education challenge is the largest programme of its type in the world. Over the course of this Parliament, we will see 11 million children or more supported into education because of the work of the UK.

**Antoinette Sandbach:** In Afghanistan, adult women are more than twice as likely as men to be illiterate, with a literacy rate of just 24%, compared with 51% for men. Does the Minister agree that there is much work to be done to close the gap between girls and boys in developing countries, and that it is in Britain's interests that we continue our world-leading efforts to close that gap?

**James Wharton:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. We will continue our efforts and continue our commitment. The UK Government are supporting 300,000 girls in Afghanistan to complete a full cycle of education. The drop-out rate for girls in Afghanistan is running at around 50%. We have to do what we can to tackle that—to help countries develop, to help address these imbalances and to secure a better future for those who live there, but for UK interests as well.

15. [907187] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Seventy-five per cent. of girls enter primary school in sub-Saharan Africa, but only 8% finish secondary school. What can DFID do to change that?

**James Wharton:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. We need to ensure that people get the education they need and can benefit from, so that those economies can grow and those countries that have often suffered so much can develop their way out of poverty with our support. In this Parliament, the Government will be supporting over 11 million children—including, separately, 6.5 million girls—into education, including in sub-Saharan Africa. There is more work that needs to be done, but we are focused on the task at hand, and we shall ensure that we get the maximum value and benefit from the work that UK taxpayers contribute to.

**Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): HIV/AIDS continues to be the largest killer of girls in the developing world. If they cannot go to school because they are ill, they cannot fulfil their potential. What more can the Government do to ensure that girls stay healthy?

**James Wharton:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I met him only a few weeks ago in his capacity as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on HIV and AIDS, and we discussed the contribution the UK makes to the global health fund. I was delighted that, shortly thereafter, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced a significant contribution from the

UK. We remain a world leader in combating HIV/AIDS, as well as many other terrible diseases that affect girls and boys, and we are determined to play our part in ensuring these diseases are tackled, and ultimately eliminated, in the best and swiftest way possible.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): This morning I was with Monir Mustafa of the White Helmets, who was absolutely clear that Assad's bombs are targeting schools in Syria and the girls inside them. Has the Minister made representations to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to come to this House and bring forward a strategy to protect schools, hospitals and civilians?

**Mr Speaker:** We are discussing education for girls in developing countries, which was, I am sure, what the hon. Lady had very much in the forefront of her mind.

**James Wharton:** Whether it is in developing countries or those that are, sadly, impacted by some of the terrible conflicts we see across the globe today, I am proud that the Government are working with their international partners and the global community to fight those who look to do ill, and to protect those who need protecting most. In no small part, that includes those girls and boys who, so often, are the innocent victims of conflict. We are continuing to do what we can to support those who are suffering in Syria. The Department is making a very significant contribution, as is the UK taxpayer, but there is so much more that needs to be done, and I accept the point the hon. Lady makes.

**Kate Osamor** (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): When the Secretary of State appeared before the International Development Committee in September, she said she was working across Government on the implementation of sustainable development goals, but she was unable to give any details. Can she now provide an update on how her Department is leading the way to ensure that that important international framework is being fully implemented through DFID's development work and here in the UK?

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel):** I have, indeed, as I mentioned at my last appearance at the IDC, been working across Government—I am working with the Cabinet Office as well—to ensure that all Government Departments, via their single departmental plans, will be meeting all of the SDGs. There will be an update forthcoming; I cannot give a date, but it will be quite soon, and I am sure it will be of interest to her when we publish it.

### Mosul

3. **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the people of Mosul; and what plans her Department has for such support once the Iraqi-led counter-Daesh operation has concluded. [907175]

5. **Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support the people of Mosul; and what plans her Department has for such support once the Iraqi-led counter-Daesh operation has concluded. [907177]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel):** The UK is at the forefront of efforts to tackle Daesh and has led the way in supporting the Government of Iraq with humanitarian and stabilisation work as part of the response in Mosul. It is not enough simply to defeat Daesh on the battlefield; we have to ensure that we support the victims of barbarous regimes to get access to humanitarian support as events unfold in Mosul.

**John Glen:** In such a complex and sensitive environment, how will DFID use its leadership role to ensure that other aid providers work together and take a united approach, to maximise the effectiveness and value for money that we can achieve from investment in this critical area?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue not only of Mosul and stabilisation, but of the humanitarian response. DFID and the British Government are leading the way and working through our membership of the humanitarian country teams. We are working closely with the UN, donors, NGOs and, of course, the Iraqi and Kurdish Governments, to deliver a co-ordinated, targeted and effective response.

**Craig Williams:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's response to the urgent humanitarian needs. What are the UK Government doing to support the Government of Iraq in preparing for securing the peace and stabilising the city of Mosul once we get it back?

**Priti Patel:** Stabilising newly liberated areas and helping people to return to their homes in a safe and secure environment is a central priority of the Government of Iraq. We are working alongside them and the UN coalition. Britain's support for the stabilisation efforts is helping the UN to clear lethal explosives, repair water supplies, restore power networks and reopen schools. Those stabilisation efforts have already helped more than 700,000 people to return home across Iraq.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): There is concern across the House about Daesh's brutal treatment of minorities, including Yazidis and Christians. What approach will DFID take on that question, and will the Secretary of State speak to the Home Secretary about the potential for a medical evacuation or resettlement programme for Iraqi minorities, similar to that which we have for Syria?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the persecution of minorities by brutal regimes such as Daesh. He is also right to highlight the cross-Government approach that we have taken. I absolutely acknowledge his points. I will reflect on them and work with my colleagues across Government to pick up on them.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree that women have a key role to play, and that we need to do whatever we can to support them? Women have been doing so much to help protect civil infrastructure in Syria. If the Government do not have a plan, will they kindly consider putting in place a women-specific plan?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Lady is right to highlight the role of women. Not enough attention is given to the role that they play in peacekeeping and stabilisation. We hear much about the consequences of conflict for women, but they can play a significant role and that will be part of our ongoing dialogue with the Government of Iraq.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): As winter creeps in across Iraq, thousands are expected to be exposed to temperatures close to zero as they flee for their life from Mosul. This is the worst time for the UNHCR to experience a funding shortfall in its winter assistance plan. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to guarantee that the UK and others meet their humanitarian obligations and address that shortfall?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise not only the humanitarian issue, but the contributions required. The UK's efforts are meeting in full our commitments to Iraq. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, at the UN General Assembly, we were the first, in terms of our pledges and commitment, for preparedness before the operation in Mosul. On the question of what more can be done, I and other colleagues in the donor community need to step up. I constantly engage with the donor community, pressing for a greater sense of urgency in getting funds, preparing for winter and, importantly, ensuring that shelter, food and emergency equipment are put in place sooner rather than later.

#### Third-party Aid Providers

4. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): How much and what proportion of UK Government aid is delivered by third-party providers. [907176]

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Rory Stewart):** As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, almost all our Department's work is done in partnership with third-party providers. Our Department provides the policy and the monitoring. In a humanitarian situation, it will be UN agencies delivering on the ground, and in a development situation, NGOs and partner Governments will work alongside us.

**John Mann:** How exactly are we going to promote our democratic values in cases where our aid budget is being delivered by a third party, such as a foreign Government, and neither the people nor the Government in the recipient country have a clue that it is UK money going in?

**Rory Stewart:** I absolutely agree that we need to make sure that when UK taxpayers are contributing, that is clear to the people receiving the money. That is also why the Secretary of State has focused hard, with all these third-party providers, on securing value for money and ensuring that the UK national interest is served and UK taxpayers get the credit.

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): Isn't it great that we have so many excellent NGOs in the UK to help us to deliver our aid programme? Does the Minister agree, however, that there is still too much competition, overlap and duplication between some of our NGOs, and that a measure of streamlining and collaboration would be most welcome?

**Rory Stewart:** That is absolutely right. Co-ordination is vital, particularly in an extreme humanitarian situation. It is terrible when people require assistance if we are wasting money duplicating effort. That is why DFID staff and UN staff are working so closely together, and that is why co-ordination is central to our multilateral aid review.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does the Minister recognise the role of civil society organisations in delivering the sustainable development goals, which the former Prime Minister helped to draft? If so, why do the sustainable development goals not even appear in the recent civil society partnership review?

**Rory Stewart:** The sustainable development goals are central, and the UK Government played a very important role in bringing them forward, but this is a cross-Government effort and we will be bringing forward a cross-Government response.

### Africa (Economic Development)

6. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote economic development in Africa. [907178]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel):** Last month in Kenya, I saw the life-saving impact of UK aid on the ground when it comes to combating drought, hunger and disease. I also saw how innovation can not only result in UK aid reaching more people, but help people to look at the long-term economic opportunities to tackle poverty and bring economic growth.

**Andrew Bridgen:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that working in partnership with Governments, businesses and investors around the world to transform economies and trading relationships, particularly in developing countries, should be a vital part of our UK diplomatic effort and our long-term prosperity strategy, especially as we approach Brexit?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. No country can defeat poverty without economic growth. Jobs, trade and investment are central to that, and the United Kingdom will be at the forefront of championing economic development and helping the poorest in the world to work their way out of poverty.

9. [907181] **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The current inquiry by the all-party group on Africa into trade and economic development has highlighted the critical role of agriculture and agribusiness in supporting economic development, and the importance that many African Governments place on that. What is the Department doing specifically to support that and to encourage British manufacturing to support Africa's growing agribusiness?

**Priti Patel:** I am delighted that the hon. Lady raises these important sectors. She is right to do so, because of the youth dividend across Africa and the enormous potential for those sectors. DFID is leading the way when it comes to agri-development and investing through CDC and other organisations. British firms are playing

a strategic role here, too. This comes back to the point that no country can defeat poverty without economic growth, and these are the core sectors that are crucial to the delivery of prosperity and jobs across Africa.

14. [907186] **Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Economic development in Africa is very reliant on tourism. What does the Secretary of State feel about the continued slaughter of elephants and the fact that it will have a devastating effect on the tourist business?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend raises a very important and controversial issue. The protection of wildlife in Africa is a priority for the Government, and we have a strategy to address it. Tourism is of course important across Africa. I have visited not just Kenya, but Sierra Leone, another country that needs to get back to investing in tourism, and that is something we can help with in the long run.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that UK taxpayers are reassured about the way in which our money is spent, and that accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure proper value for money?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the whole issue of value for money, which we in DFID will champion on behalf of British taxpayers. It is right that money goes to the right countries and the right people, because every pound that is not spent in the right way means that people do not get access to life-saving treatment or poverty reduction. Our mission in the Department is to ensure that we can eradicate poverty, but also to make sure that the money goes exactly where it needs to go.

### Topical Questions

T1. [907188] **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Priti Patel):** No country can defeat poverty without sustained economic growth. Later today, the Government will introduce the Commonwealth Development Corporation Bill, which will raise the limit on the level of financial support that the Government can provide to the CDC. By doing so, we will be able to help to create more jobs and to boost economic growth in Africa and south Asia, so that people can lift themselves out of poverty and leave aid dependency behind. I will write to colleagues with further information.

**Amanda Milling:** Will my right hon. Friend outline what humanitarian relief the Government are providing to support those affected by the conflict in Yemen?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the appalling scenarios we are seeing in Yemen right now. There is a deteriorating situation and a humanitarian crisis, with an increasing number of Yemenis facing food shortages and suffering malnutrition. There has been a recent outbreak of cholera as well. The UK is

the fourth largest donor, and has committed to spending £109 million in Yemen, helping more than 1.3 million Yemenis—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There are far too many very noisy private conversations taking place while we are discussing the fate of some of the most vulnerable people on the planet. The message is quite clear: hush or, alternatively, leave the Chamber.

**Priti Patel:** Last year, we helped more than 1.3 million Yemenis to get access to food, medical supplies and water. My hon. Friend will know that we have recently helped to raise over £100 million, via the UN, to strengthen humanitarian support for people in Yemen.

T3. [907190] **Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State understand the frustrations felt by DFID's partners in civil society organisations and in the wider world about the continued delay in the publication of the bilateral and multilateral aid reviews? When will they be published, and will there be a statement or a chance to debate the proposals in this place?

**Priti Patel:** I have recently spent much time with civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations and the great organisations doing life-saving work on the ground. We have recently published the “DFID Research Review” and the “Civil Society Partnership Review”. With regards to the development aid reviews—the multilateral and bilateral aid reviews—I can tell the hon. Gentleman that they will be coming by the end of the month.

T2. [907189] **Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I welcome the work the Secretary of State is doing to ensure that UK aid to the Palestinian Authority does not directly fund payments to terrorist prisoners, but will she assure the House that she is doing everything possible to ensure that they do not indirectly fund such payments by freeing up resources that would otherwise be spent on day-to-day PA activities?

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Rory Stewart):** We have made it clear that our focus will be very much targeted on health, education and co-existence projects. We ensure that any support going in is carefully vetted, with an independent auditor; is directed to what will provide value for money; and, above all, will benefit the Palestinian people.

T4. [907192] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Will the Secretary of State agree to put people before profit, following the publication of her Department's “Civil Society Partnership Review”, and therefore ensure that any private sector involvement in the provision of UK development aid is driven by operational necessity, not the pursuit of profit?

**Priti Patel:** As I have mentioned, we have published the “Civil Society Partnership Review”, on which I spent time speaking to many of the great organisations involved in the delivery of aid and humanitarian work around the world. We make sure that British aid—UK

taxpayers' money—goes to the right causes via the right organisations, and DFID will continue to pursue that. We are championing taxpayer value, while delivering poverty reduction and humanitarian support and assistance.

T7. [907195] **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The scenes of the war crimes committed by Daesh in the Assyrian capital of Nimrud are, on top of their human carnage, truly depressing and a wake-up call to the world that we need to work together to protect the world's cultural heritage. Will the Secretary of State commit to continuing to play our part within UNESCO, notwithstanding the reservations she may have about the organisation's finances?

**Priti Patel:** My hon. Friend raises an important point about the destruction of cultural and heritage sites around the world. I have been clear that, in funding international organisations, we wish to see reform in the system to make sure that money is spent in the right way. We will continue to deliver value for money. DFID will publish the reviews that reflect on UNESCO towards the end of the month and he will see the approach we are taking.

T5. [907193] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Further to an earlier question, will the Minister commit to fast-track the review of aid for the families of Palestinian prisoners, in the knowledge that any reduction in that aid will bankrupt the Palestinian Authority, undermine politicians who are working for a peaceful solution and play into the hands of those, like Hamas, who want to pursue a course of violence?

**Rory Stewart:** The Department remains entirely committed to the following principles. First, anything we do must encourage a two-state solution by ensuring that the Palestinian people are served with proper services. Secondly, we must make sure that the money goes in the right way to the right people. That is all about auditing, vetting and making sure that the real beneficiaries are there. Of course we will ensure that the review is done as efficiently as possible to serve the interests of the Palestinian people and the stability of the region.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [907158] **Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 16 November.

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** I am sure that the whole House will join me in expressing our condolences to the families and friends of the seven people who lost their lives and those who were injured in the tragic tram incident in Croydon last Wednesday. We all thank those involved in the rescue operation.

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

**Wendy Morton:** Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming today's news that the unemployment rate has fallen to an 11-year low? Will she join me in thanking all those businesses that create jobs, such as Jennifer Ashe & Son, whose funeral home on Brownhills High Street in my constituency I was kindly asked to open last weekend?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I am pleased to say that in the last year, employment in her constituency of Aldridge-Brownhills has gone up by 88,000. It is good to hear of companies that are providing new jobs. The employment figures show the strength of the fundamentals of our economy: the employment rate has never been higher and the unemployment rate is lower than it has been in more than a decade. I am sure that Members from all parts of the House will welcome yesterday's news that Google will create another 3,000 jobs.

**Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington North) (Lab): I concur with the remarks the Prime Minister made about the disaster in Croydon last week. We send our sympathies to all those who lost loved ones and express our solidarity with the emergency workers who went through such trauma in freeing people from the wreckage.

It appears from press reports that the Chagos islanders who were expelled from their homes over 40 years ago will suffer another injustice today with the denial of their right of return. Yesterday, the Foreign Secretary told European media that Brexit would "probably" mean leaving the customs union. Will the Prime Minister confirm whether that is the case?

**The Prime Minister:** I think the right hon. Gentleman was trying to get two issues in there. On the issue of the Chagos islanders, there will be a written ministerial statement to the House later today, so everybody will be able to see the position the Government are taking.

On the whole issue of the customs union and the trading relationships we will have with the European Union and other parts of the world once we have left the European Union, we are preparing carefully for the formal negotiations, but—[*Interruption.*] We are preparing carefully for the formal negotiations. What we want to ensure is that we have the best possible trading deal with the European Union once we have left.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I asked the Prime Minister, actually, about the Foreign Secretary's remarks about leaving the customs union. He is only a few places down from her. Mr Speaker, would it be in order for the Foreign Secretary to come forward and tell us what he actually said? I am sure we would all be better informed if he did.

Earlier this week, a leaked memo said that the Government are

"considerably short of having a plan for Brexit...No common strategy has emerged...in part because of the divisions within the Cabinet."

If this memo is, as the Prime Minister's press department says, written by ill-informed consultants, will she put the Government's plan and common strategy for Brexit before Parliament?

**The Prime Minister:** I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that, yes, we do have a plan. Our plan is to deliver the best possible deal in trading with and operating

within the European Union. Our plan is to deliver control of the movement of people from the European Union into the United Kingdom. Our plan is to go out there across the world and negotiate free trade agreements around the rest of the world. This Government are absolutely united in their determination to deliver on the will of the British people and to deliver Brexit. The right hon. Gentleman's shadow Cabinet cannot even decide whether it supports Brexit.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Well, the word does not seem to have travelled very far. I have to say, I sympathise with the Italian Government Minister who said this week, about the Prime Minister's Government:

"Somebody needs to tell us something, and it needs to be something that makes sense."

Is not the truth that the Government are making a total shambles of Brexit, and nobody understands what their strategy actually is?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course those in the European Union whom we will be negotiating with will want us to set out at this stage every detail of our negotiating strategy. If we were to do that, it would be the best possible way of ensuring that we got the worst result for this country. That is why we will not do it.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Talking of worst results, the Foreign Secretary has been very helpful this week, because he informed the world that "Brexit means Brexit"—we did not know that before—and that

"we are going to make a titanic success of it."

Taking back control, if that is what Brexit is to mean—[*Interruption.*] The Prime Minister is getting advice from the Foreign Secretary now; can we all hear it? Taking back control clearly requires some extra administration. Deloitte has spoken, saying:

"One Department estimates it needs a 40% increase in staff to cope with its Brexit projects",

and that overall expectations are of an increased headcount of between 10,000 and 30,000 civil servants. If that estimate is wrong, can the Prime Minister tell the House exactly how many extra civil servants will be required to conduct these negotiations? Her Ministers need to know—they are desperate for an answer from her.

**The Prime Minister:** I repeat for the right hon. Gentleman that we are doing the preparations necessary for the point at which we will start the complex formal negotiations with the European Union. I have set up a Department for Exiting the European Union, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing an excellent job there in making those preparations.

I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that from the confusion that he has on his Benches in relation to the issue of Brexit, it seems to be yet another example from Labour of how where they talk, we act. They posture, we deliver. We are getting on with the job, he is not up to the job.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** Well, Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*] That was exciting, wasn't it? Mr Speaker—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber. I say to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), calm yourself, man. You should

seek to imitate the calm and repose of your right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), who is setting an example for all Members of the House.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** I do not wish to promote any further division on their Benches, Mr Speaker.

These are the most complex set of negotiations ever undertaken by this country. The civil service has been cut down to its lowest level since the second world war. The Prime Minister's main focus surely ought to be coming up with a serious plan. May I ask her to clarify something? If, when the Supreme Court meets at the beginning of December, it decides to uphold the decision of the High Court, will the Lord Chancellor this time defend our independent judiciary against any public attacks?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there have been two cases in the UK courts on the prerogative power and its use. The Northern Ireland court found in favour of the Government; the High Court found against the Government. We are appealing to the Supreme Court. We have a good argument, and will put the case to the Supreme Court. I believe and this Government believe in the independence of our judiciary, and the judiciary will consider that decision and come to their judgment on the basis of the arguments put before them. But we also believe that our democracy is underpinned by the freedom of our press.

**Jeremy Corbyn:** My question was on defending the independence of the judiciary. We should all be doing that. We have an International Development Secretary who is opposed to overseas aid, a Health Secretary who is running down our national health service, a Chancellor with no fiscal strategy, a Lord Chancellor who seems to have difficulty defending the judiciary, a Brexit team with no plan for Brexit and, as has just been shown, a Prime Minister who is not prepared to answer questions on what the actual Brexit strategy is. We need a better answer than she has given us.

**The Prime Minister:** I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what we have got. We have an International Development Secretary delivering on this Government's commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on international development, a Health Secretary delivering on £10 billion of extra funding for the health service and a Chancellor of the Exchequer making sure we have the stable economy that creates the wealth necessary to pay for our public services. And what we certainly have got is a Leader of the Opposition who is incapable of leading.

Q6. [907163] **Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Prime Minister understands that we are a one nation party or we are nothing, something our political opponents consistently underestimate, to their cost. In the autumn statement next week will she continue to pursue that agenda with all the resource and vigour she can muster, including by increasing significantly further the personal allowance, so that the lower paid disproportionately benefit?

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): They do the absolute opposite!

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is always interesting to hear the thoughts of the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) but they should not be articulated from a sedentary position and will have to wait for another occasion.

**The Prime Minister:** Before I answer my hon. Friend's question, may I wish his wife all the very best in the treatment she is going through at the moment? The thoughts of the House are with her.

My hon. Friend is right. We have a manifesto commitment to increase the personal allowance. By increasing it from £6,475 in 2010-11 to £11,000 in 2016-17 and £11,500 next year, we have cut income tax for more than 30 million people and have taken 4 million people out of paying income tax altogether. That is important. It has helped people at the lower end of the income scale.

**Angus Robertson** (Moray) (SNP): We join the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in extending our condolences following the tragedy in Croydon and in paying tribute to the emergency services.

The Institute for Government, which has close ties to the civil service, has published a report saying that the UK Government's approach towards Brexit is "chaotic and dysfunctional", that Brexit poses an "existential threat" to operations in Whitehall Departments, that the Prime Minister has a "secretive approach" towards Brexit, and that the present situation is "unsustainable". Does the Prime Minister plan to carry on like this regardless?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman will not be surprised when I tell him what the Government are doing in relation to Brexit. As I said earlier, the most important thing for the Government to do is calmly and carefully to get on with the job of preparing for complex negotiations. One of the most important things we can do is to make sure that we are not giving a running commentary on those negotiations and on our stance, because that would be the best way to get the worst deal for this country.

**Angus Robertson:** On the day we hear that "post-truth" has become the international word of the year, we have a running commentary from the Foreign Secretary. He is prepared to tell the media in the Czech Republic that the United Kingdom is likely to leave the EU customs union post-Brexit, but that it still wants to trade freely afterwards. In response, his colleague from the Netherlands said that that option "doesn't exist" and is "impossible". Both those things cannot be correct, so will the Prime Minister confirm today, to Parliament and to the country, whether the UK is likely to leave the EU customs union post-Brexit—yes or no?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman does not actually seem to understand that the customs union is not just a binary decision, but let us set that to one side. Let us look at what we need to do: get the best possible deal for access to, trading with and operating within the single European market. He stands up time and again in Prime Minister's questions and says to me that he wants access to the single European market.

I might remind him that it was only a couple of years ago that he wanted to take Scotland out of the single European market by making it independent. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Mr Docherty-Hughes, you are in a very emotional condition. I normally regard you as a cerebral denizen of the House. Try to recover your composure, man!

Q15. [907172] **James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): In Southend, crimes such as burglary and vehicle theft are down, but knife crime is on the increase, particularly that perpetrated by drug dealers and drug users. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this will be a priority for Her Majesty's Government? Specifically, is there anything more that she can do to help police and crime commissioners such as Roger Hirst to deal with this very big challenge?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for raising an issue that is very important for everybody in the House. Certainly the Government will do all they can to support police and crime commissioners such as Roger Hirst, who is already doing an excellent job in Essex. Since 2009, knife crime figures have fallen overall, but I recognise my hon. Friend's concerns. That is why the Home Office has been supporting police forces such as Essex in conducting weeks of action against knives under Operation Sceptre. We have legislated to ban dangerous knives, including zombie knives. We are putting tough sentences in place and making sure that offenders are punished. We should send a very clear message that we will not tolerate knife crime in this country.

Q2. [907159] **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Many people in this country visit the United States every year to study, on business, or simply to enjoy one of the greatest countries on earth. What action will the Prime Minister take if the new President-elect carries through his campaign promise to discriminate against our citizens on the basis of their religion? Will she give a commitment that the special relationship which she believes her Government have with the US presidency will be conducted on the basis of respect for the dignity of all our citizens, irrespective of their race or religion?

**The Prime Minister:** I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that our special relationship with the United States is, I think, very important to both the United States and the United Kingdom. We will continue to build on it, as was clear from the conversation that I had with President-elect Trump shortly after his election, and of course we want to ensure the dignity of our citizens. It is up to the United States what rules it puts in place for entry across its borders, but we will ensure that the special relationship continues, and does so in the interests of both the UK and the US.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Last Tuesday, I attended an infection prevention and control summit that highlighted the great work done by the Department of Health, the NHS and other organisations dramatically to decrease MRSA infection rates, yet also raised the growing threat of E. coli and sepsis. Will my right hon. Friend join me in commending such events and outline the Government's strategy for combatting superbugs?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely join my hon. Friend, who raises a very important issue, in commending such events. It true that the DOH, Public Health England and the NHS are doing vital work to decrease infection rates. We have already seen some very good results—a 57% reduction in MRSA bloodstream infections since 2010 and a 47% reduction in C. diff infections—but of course there is more to do, which is why we are setting bold objectives to halve gram-negative blood infections by 2020, and why last week we announced a new national infection lead to champion and oversee this effort. This is an important issue and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising it.

Q3. [907160] **Mr Douglas Carswell** (Clacton) (UKIP): Free trade is vital to our future prosperity, and Brexit does not mean rejecting globalisation. Will the Prime Minister ensure that any new trade deals with the wider world after Brexit are based on the mutual recognition of standards, not on the kind of over-elaborate, prescriptive, top-down regulatory regime that underpins the European single market?

**The Prime Minister:** I welcome the hon. Gentleman's support for free trade. He is absolutely right that as we leave the EU we will be looking for opportunities to develop flexible trading relationships around the world that suit the United Kingdom. Given the strength of our economy, I believe that we can go out there and be a global leader in free trade, and I welcome his support for that.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): Last Wednesday, seven people tragically died and 50 were injured in a tram accident in Croydon. I am sure that the whole House will join the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the leader of the SNP in extending our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. Three investigations—by British Transport Police, the Office of Rail and Road, and the Rail Accident Investigation Branch—are under way. Will the Prime Minister assure the House and the families that any recommendations to improve safety on trams in Croydon and across the country that are made by those investigations will be rapidly implemented by the Government?

**The Prime Minister:** I join my hon. Friend in once again sending our condolences to the families and friends of the seven people who died in this terrible incident, in expressing our sympathies for those injured and affected, and in thanking our emergency services. It is important that we allow these investigations to continue and that they can come up with recommendations in due course; we will, of course, look very seriously at them. We can never be complacent about safety and security regarding such issues, so we need to make sure that if there are lessons to be learned, they are indeed learned.

#### Employment and Support Allowance/Universal Credit

Q4. [907161] **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): If she will postpone proposed reductions to employment and support allowance and universal credit; and what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on those reductions.

**The Prime Minister:** The Government are committed to protecting the most vulnerable in society, including disabled people and those with health conditions, and people currently receiving employment and support allowance will continue to receive the same level of financial support. We are ensuring that the support is concentrated on those most in need, and that it is available not just through benefits, but as part of a wider package to help those who could get into the workplace reach the point where they can get into the workplace.

**Neil Gray:** This week, the Prime Minister said:

“Change is in the air. And when people demand change, it is the job of politicians to respond”,

so how does she respond to the 70 disability organisations that want these cuts stopped, or indeed to Conservative Members who have supported my cross-party motion calling for these cuts to be halted, which will be debated tomorrow? Surely she must respond accordingly.

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said, we are focusing support on those most in need. For those in the support group for ESA, support has gone up, and we are giving extra support to help those in the work-related group who could at some stage get into the workplace to do so. It is important that we do not view this solely as an issue of benefits; it is about the whole package that is available, which includes the personal independence payments that provide for the living costs of disability. Let me gently remind the hon. Gentleman that if he is concerned about the levels of payment in Scotland, he might wish to talk to the Scottish Government about the new powers that they have, whether they intend to use them and how they would fund them.

### Engagements

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): Following the election of Mr Trump, and given the very welcome progress made in our society by women and those from ethnic minorities, what message of reassurance does the Prime Minister have for fat, middle-aged white men, who may feel that we have been left behind?

**The Prime Minister:** That is a very interesting point. Perhaps my hon. Friend would like to come up and see me some time.

Q5. [907162] **Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): In its state of the nation report, the Government's Social Mobility Commission today issued a damning verdict on progress: things are getting worse. The commission concluded that the key drivers of social mobility—quality in early education, narrowing the educational attainment gap, and access to work and housing—are all going backwards on the Prime Minister's watch. When will she come forward with a real strategy for opportunity for all, instead of fixating on creating an even more elite education for those who are already elite?

**The Prime Minister:** I note that the Social Mobility Commission has recorded today that more working class youngsters are benefiting from higher education than at any point in our history. The Government have invested record amounts in childcare and the early years, and the attainment gap, as the report acknowledges, has actually narrowed. The hon. Lady refers to the education system and the reintroduction of grammar

schools, so I refer her to the report commissioned by a Labour council in Knowsley to look at how it could improve educational achievement there. That report said:

“Re-introducing grammar schools is potentially a transformative idea for working class areas”.

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): Today the BBC World Service announced its biggest expansion since the 1940s, including 11 new services in different languages, bringing the total number of languages covered around the world to 40. Does the Prime Minister agree that this is an excellent example of soft power and a lifeline to many people around the world?

**The Prime Minister:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The service that the BBC provides through its World Service and the independent journalism that that brings to millions of people around the world is very important, including by bringing that to people in places where free speech is often limited. It is important to support the BBC World Service, which is why we are investing £289 million over the next four years so that it can provide accurate and independent news to some of the most remote parts of the world.

Q7. [907164] **Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): The University of St Andrews in my constituency gets 25% of its research funding from the EU. It has benefited from freedom of movement, which brings some of the finest researchers to St Andrews and elsewhere. What guarantees can the Prime Minister give about research funding and freedom of movement for academics, particularly after 2020?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman will know that we have already given guarantees about the research funding available from the EU and those contracts that will be signed. He will know, too, that within the immigration rules for people outside the EU, we are already able to ensure that the brightest and the best can come to the United Kingdom. I remind the hon. Gentleman, however, as I reminded his right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), that it was not that long ago since he was campaigning to come out of the European Union and come out of free movement.

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): In a Committee yesterday, I learned that the Iraq Historic Allegations Team had placed serving members and veterans under surveillance in this country. I also learned that, despite everything we have said, we have paid for “chasing” lawyers to go out and collect evidence in theatre. I know of the Prime Minister's commitment to this agenda. Does she agree that we need to work harder to close the gap between what we say and how things actually feel for our servicemen and women?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. I recognise the concern that has been expressed by a number of my hon. Friends about the impact of the IHAC on servicemen and women. It is important that we ensure that it conducts its inquiries within a reasonable timescale, which it is now set to do, and that it weeds out what could be described as the more frivolous cases. I am sure that my hon. Friend will accept that credible allegations of criminal activity should be investigated properly, but I am conscious of the need to ensure that

our servicemen and women, who do such a good job for us around the world and keep us safe and secure, have the support that they need.

#### Ministerial Meetings (First Minister)

Q8. [907165] **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): When she next plans to meet the First Minister of Scotland.

**The Prime Minister:** I recently met the First Minister and leaders of the devolved Administrations at the Joint Ministerial Committee. Its next meeting is planned for early in the new year. Of course, the United Kingdom Government engage regularly with the Scottish Government on a range of issues.

**Martin Docherty-Hughes:** There is a question that is, I am sure, vexing not just the First Minister but the whole of Scotland. On 22 June, Ruth Davidson stated that those supporting the leave campaign

“won’t tell us what they will replace the single market with.”

Now that the Prime Minister is part of a Government who are dragging Scotland out of the European Union against its sovereign will, can she answer Ruth Davidson?

**The Prime Minister:** And on 23 June, the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, and that is what the Government will deliver. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Members should not seek to shout down the Prime Minister. The question was asked, and the answer has been provided.

#### Engagements

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): It is right that the Prime Minister has latitude to enter into negotiations with the EU. However, the Vote Leave campaign was very clear that the rights of EU citizens would not be affected if this country voted to leave. My parents are Italian. They have never naturalised and have been in this country for 50 years. Can the Prime Minister assure me that she will never instruct me to vote in the Lobby to take away the rights of my parents and those of millions of other EU citizens?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the personal passion with which my hon. Friend raises this issue. I want, intend and expect to be able to guarantee the rights of EU citizens living in the United Kingdom, but I also want the rights of UK citizens living in EU member states to be guaranteed. As I have said previously, I hope that this is an issue that we shall be able to discuss with my European colleagues at an early stage.

Q9. [907166] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Dementia is the single greatest health crisis faced by this country. New figures published by the Office for National Statistics reveal that dementia and Alzheimer’s disease are now the leading cause of death. In Bradford, however, there can be up to four months between referral and diagnosis. Will the Prime Minister pledge today to bring about parity in end-of-life care for people with dementia, and commit to introducing a specialist end-of-life service for those who are diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease?

**The Prime Minister:** I commend the hon. Lady for raising an issue that I know is a personal concern for her. It affects the constituents of Members in all parts of the House. We have set ourselves the ambitious target of 4 million dementia friends by 2020; we already have 1.6 million. We have doubled research spending on dementia and invested in the development of a dementia research institute. We are determined to transform end-of-life care, which is why we have created the national end-of-life care programme board, which will help to implement the commitment to high-quality, personalised end-of-life care for all. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising this important issue and assure her that it is something on which the Government are focusing.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): At the same time as the Government are rightly restoring hundreds of millions of pounds of funding to the BBC World Service, there are no current plans to restore the very modest £20 million a year it costs to run BBC Monitoring. Former members of the Intelligence and Security Committee such as Lord Menzies Campbell and I are dismayed that the BBC is proposing to cut the monitoring service further, to close Caversham Park and to break the colocation with its American counterparts. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet us and have a discussion before this disaster is visited on an incomparable source of open-source information on which so many Government Departments and intelligence agencies depend?

**The Prime Minister:** My right hon. Friend raises an important issue. Of course the staffing and provision for the monitoring service are matters for the BBC, but we are clear about the importance of the service. It provides high-quality reporting for the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and other parts of Government, and of course for the BBC itself. As part of the charter renewal process, we are talking to the BBC about a new agreement in relation to the BBC monitoring role that we believe will result in an improved service for Government, not a reduced one.

Q10. [907167] **Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): The Prime Minister does not seem to have very much control over world events, but she should at least be able to get a grip on the child abuse inquiry that she set up. In two years, it has lost not only three chairs, but now eight senior lawyers, the latest citing further concerns about competency and leadership. The Prime Minister will surely be as aware as me that further serious allegations that have been made to the inquiry panel have gone uninvestigated, so will she tell us whether she shares the full confidence in the inquiry that her Home Secretary expressed some moments ago, and if so, why?

**The Prime Minister:** I recognise the importance of this issue to the hon. Lady. It is one on which she has campaigned, and she champions the cause of the victims and survivors. Of course, like her, it is the victims and survivors whom we must always keep at the forefront of our minds. That is why it is important that this inquiry is able to continue, and I agree. This point was made this morning by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the new Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. We owe it to the survivors and victims for the inquiry to continue.

I have to say that, having seen the work that Professor Alexis Jay did in the Rotherham inquiry, I have absolute confidence in her ability to undertake this inquiry.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): During the United States election, President-elect Trump stated that Britain should not be at the back of any trade queue, but should be at the front. Now that he has been elected President, what action will the Prime Minister's Government be taking to ensure that the already very good trading conditions between the USA and the United Kingdom further improve?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I mentioned earlier the special relationship between the UK and the USA. We now have an opportunity in our trading relationship with the USA, and that is something I will want to discuss with President-elect Trump at a very early stage.

Q11. [907168] **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Too often social media is the weapon of choice of those who seek to bully and intimidate others. It was the weapon used against my young constituent, Declan Duncan, when his bullies tried literally to run him out of his own hometown, making his life a misery. Will the Prime Minister agree to meet Declan and me to discuss how companies such as Facebook and Twitter can be held to account for their platforms being too easily used by those who try to harass and bully others?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue. Social media is overall a good that is used for good intents—it is even used by political parties for campaigning and in other ways—but it can also be abused and ill-used by people who wish to bully others, and there are Members of this House who have suffered significantly as a result of bullying and trolling on social media. The Home Office is well apprised of this issue. Over the years—I did this when I was Home Secretary—it has been talking to the companies about their responsibilities. The issue is best addressed through the terms and conditions of the companies themselves, and I am sure that the Home Secretary has listened very carefully to the hon. Gentleman's point.

**Philip Davies** (ShIPLEY) (Con): In the teeth of opposition from the Conservative party, the last Labour Government changed the law to make sure that all prisoners were released halfway through their sentence, irrespective of whether they had misbehaved in prison or still posed a threat to the public—[HON. MEMBERS: "Rubbish!"]

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Philip Davies:** That must have contributed to the upsurge in violence in our prisons. Does the Prime Minister agree with the previous Labour Government that prisoners should be released halfway through their sentence, irrespective of how badly they have behaved or the threat they pose to the general public, or does she agree with me that this is an outrage that flies in the face of public opinion and must be reversed?

**The Prime Minister:** The important point, as my hon. Friend indicates, is that when decisions are taken about the release of prisoners, proper consideration is given to the impact of that release on the wider community. That is why this issue has been looked at, and I can

assure him that it was an issue of concern when I was Home Secretary. But this is not just about the conditions under which prisoners are released; it is actually about how we ensure that we have measures in place to rehabilitate ex-offenders. That is why the work that has been done by previous Justice Secretaries, which is being continued by the current Justice Secretary, is important to ensure that we reduce reoffending by prisoners when they are released.

Q13. [907170] **George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): Can the Prime Minister confirm or deny that there have been official conversations at any level about giving Nigel Farage a peerage?

**The Prime Minister:** All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that such matters are normally never discussed in public.

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the announcement of phase 2 of High Speed 2 from Crewe to Manchester airport and into Manchester Piccadilly, bringing jobs and prosperity to Weaver Vale, to Cheshire and to the north-west region including north Wales, thereby closing the north-south divide?

**The Prime Minister:** I know that my hon. Friend has championed the cause of HS2 for a long time, and he is absolutely right. I welcome the Government's announcement about this. It shows that we are willing to take the big decisions that will help to support our communities and our economy. Crucially, as he says, HS2 will support the economy in the part of the country that he represents.

Q14. [907171] **Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): The very special relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland has flourished over the years. Holyhead in my constituency plays a major part in that, thanks to freedom of travel, which both countries have enjoyed within the European Union, which we both joined in 1973. Now that the UK has voted to leave the European Union, can the Prime Minister assure us that there will be no extra barriers at Welsh ports that could threaten trade, tourism and that special relationship?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman refers to free movement arrangements being in place since 1973, but the common travel area was actually started 50 years earlier, in 1923, so it existed for some considerable time before we were in the European Union. I repeat what I have said in the House before when asked about this issue: we are working with the Government of the Republic of Ireland and with the Northern Ireland Executive, and we are very clear that we do not want a return to the borders of the past. We recognise the importance of those movements of trade and people to those on both sides of that border.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I say to expectant hon. Members who are itching to raise points of order that points of order come after urgent questions. I am sure that they can restrain their appetites for a period.

## Calais Children and Immigration Act

12.44 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if she will make a statement on the Calais children and the guidance document published by her Department for section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill)**: The Home Secretary updated the House on 24 October on how the Government were supporting the French authorities in the humanitarian operation to clear the camp in Calais. That statement outlined the Government's absolute commitment to bring eligible children from France to the UK. That included those with close family links under the Dublin regulation and those unaccompanied refugee children who met the wider criteria of the Dubs amendment to the 2016 Act. These children are the very youngest, those assessed as being at a high risk of sexual exploitation, and those likely to be granted refugee status in the UK. On Monday, my Department published further details of the policy, including our intention to prioritise the youngest.

We remain absolutely committed to bringing all eligible children to the UK as soon as possible. More than 300 children have been transferred from France since 10 October. Transfers were resumed over the weekend, and another 19 girls assessed as being at high risk of sexual exploitation were brought to Scotland. It is important to note that all the children previously in the camp in Calais are now in the care of the French authorities. Staff from the UK supported the French operation to move the children from the container area in the camp to specialist centres across France, where they are receiving the care and protection they need.

Home Office staff, interpreters and social workers are currently visiting the centres to carry out the necessary assessments to determine whether it is in the best interests of the child to be transferred to the UK. The Government have continued to seek every opportunity to expedite this process, but as has previously been made clear we must work alongside the French and with their permission. I am grateful for the support of the local authorities that have stepped forward to accommodate the children and look forward to continuing to work closely with those authorities to ensure we do not place an unnecessary burden on them.

The Government are getting on with the job of bringing eligible children over to the UK, working closely with the French authorities to ensure that both Governments are working in the best of interests of these children. I hope that the whole House will join me in supporting that.

**Tom Brake**: The chaotic demolition of the Calais camp, which abandoned some children on the street, leaves upwards of 1,000 children in basic and temporary care facilities in France. In the days running up to the demolition, the Home Secretary made statements that pointed to the UK offering a home for up to half of the children in the camp. It is unclear how that will be achieved given the criteria in the guidance document, so I hope that in answering my questions the Government will be able to explain how that will be done.

What progress has the Home Secretary and her Department made with local authorities on agreeing the number of vulnerable children the UK will take from Calais and other European camps? Will the guidance and the criteria apply to other European countries, such as Italy and Greece? When will the criteria for those countries be produced? Why has the Home Office limited one of the criteria to Sudanese and Syrian unaccompanied children? Why are Eritrean children excluded? Can the Minister explain why they have chosen to exclude 16 and 17-year-old children from the eligibility criteria in Calais given the universal recognition that they are still children and still vulnerable? Given the Government's commitment to tackling modern slavery and exploitation at home and across the globe, will the Minister clarify why the vulnerability of these child victims is not included in the "at risk" criteria? Finally, what guarantees can the Minister give that the children who will eventually be allowed into the UK will not be deported on reaching the age of 18?

This House agreed to the Dubs amendment and our Government must now set out how they are going to honour its letter and spirit.

**Mr Goodwill**: It was absolutely right that, during the final days of the camp clearance, there was a pause. As the right hon. Gentleman said, there were some chaotic scenes, but they were not as chaotic as some of the scenarios that we had planned for, including violence, possible injury and even death, during that clearance. Now that the children have been transported to the reception centres—or welcome centres as the French call them—around the country, we can now assess them under the criteria of the Dubs amendment. More than 300 children have already been transferred to the UK, and we expect several hundred more to be transferred under both the Dubs amendment and the Dublin regulations.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the numbers. Under the Dublin regulations, there is no limit on numbers—if the children meet the criterion of having family here, they will be brought across. That applies not just to France, but to Italy, where we have Home Office people working, and to Greece, where things are slightly more difficult, but where we hope to make progress.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the Syrians and the Sudanese. It is absolutely important that the children we bring across are those who are more likely to qualify for asylum. He mentioned the Eritreans. I know that there are particular issues with Eritrea—I have been taking an interest in that country, particularly in the open-ended nature of the national service there—but we did update our country guidance in October to reflect the court judgment. The threshold that we have put in place is based on overall grant rates for the year ending June 2016, and the nationalities that have a grant rate of 75% or higher are the Sudanese and the Syrians. Yes, he is absolutely right that when children arrive in the UK they should claim asylum, and they will be processed in the usual way.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): What is the average age of the children?

**Mr Goodwill**: The demographics of the children in the camp are that 90% were male and 60% of them were in the age group of 16 and above. We are determined to

assess the most vulnerable children, as they are the ones whom the Dubs amendment suggests that we assess. That includes those who are 12 and under; those who are 15 and below whose nationalities are likely to qualify them for refugee status; and those at high risk of sexual exploitation, including particularly the girls who could be trafficked.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): The qualifying eligibility criteria for children from Calais are a disgrace. The children have to meet one of the following criteria: they are aged under 12; they have been referred by the French authorities as being at high risk of sexual exploitation; they are aged under 15 and are Syrian or Sudanese; and they are aged under 18 and the sibling of a child in one of the former categories. They must also all meet the following criteria: it must be in the best interests of the child; they must have been in Calais on or before 24 October 2016; and they must have been in Europe before 20 March 2016. The criteria are a disgrace, and are certainly not in the spirit of the Dubs amendment.

On the basis of the criteria, it seems that any child at medium or moderate risk of sexual exploitation is on their own. A child is a child until the age of 18, and it is wrong to restrict children's right to transfer based on their age. It is not clear what the basis or authority for determining the additional criteria are, or whether there is any appeals procedure.

The arbitrary dates mean that children who came to Europe after 20 March are on their own, whatever their age, and that children who came to Europe after 24 October are on their own. Children are at risk of all kinds of exploitation, including trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery, but this Government do not care. *[Interruption.]* If Members are not comfortable with what I am saying, that is not my problem. Without a proper asylum process, we risk pushing children into taking dangerous journeys to the UK in order to get a fair hearing for their asylum claim. None of this meets the Dubs amendment, which is that any child who would benefit from asylum in the UK should be granted it—up to 3,000 children. Will the Government now meet the full demands of section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 as voted for in this House?

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Lady has gone completely over the top. I am proud that the United Kingdom is the second biggest donor in the region. I am proud that the United Kingdom has agreed to take 20,000 people from the region and an additional 3,000 people, including children from the wider area. I am proud of the work that we are doing and I am proud that we are meeting our obligations under the Dublin regulations and the Dubs amendment. If she reads the Dubs amendment, she will understand that the number we bring across should be able to be accommodated by our local authorities.

I have been working very closely with local authorities. I met representatives of the local authorities at their summit on 13 October and I spoke at their conference on 3 November. We are working very closely with them to ensure that the children we bring across can be accommodated, and, as I have said, 118 local authorities are doing that.

I remind the hon. Lady that the children we do not bring across are not in Syria, but in France, which is a civilised country with a developed social system. Those

children are being well supported and well looked after in France. The children about whom I am most concerned are those who are still in Syria—they are the ones we are endeavouring to help.

The reason why we do not consider children who arrived in Europe after 20 March is, simply that we do not want to introduce a pull factor that will incentivise parents to pay people traffickers to help their children make that hazardous journey across the Sahara, across the Mediterranean and, in many cases, end in a watery grave. That is why that date has been chosen and why we do not want to do anything to introduce a pull factor that would increase the number of people drowning in the Mediterranean or the Aegean.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Let me tell the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) that I know that this Minister is absolutely committed to safeguarding and protecting unaccompanied refugee children.

I have constituents who have been working as volunteers in the Jungle, and they have contacted me—I have also contacted the Department about them—because they still have some concerns about the children who have been scattered across France. They are still in direct contact with those children by mobile phone. What would be the best way for my constituents to contact the Department to give real-time and up-to-date information about these vulnerable children who they believe have a right to come to the UK?

**Mr Goodwill:** First, let me pay tribute to the non-governmental organisations that have been working in France. I am talking about not only the French NGOs such as France terre d'asile, but British charities that have been working in the camp, giving the children much-needed help, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is one of our partner organisations working in France and the wider region. Anyone who is in contact with a child in France should tell them to apply for asylum in France. That child's claim will be considered and they will be looked after in France. One problem that we faced during the Calais camp situation was that the people traffickers and the organised criminals were advising people not to apply for asylum. That is the wrong advice to give. It is important that they do apply for asylum in France, which is a safe country for them to be in.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): The debates that we had in this House on the Dubs amendment were among the most passionate that I have seen since my election 18 months ago. How section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016 is now implemented is important to this House and deserves the greatest scrutiny. Surely the Government will agree to a proper debate in this Chamber on the content of the guidance that they have issued, because restrictions appearing in the guidance were certainly never contemplated during the Dubs debates.

My party shares the uneasiness about the exclusion of any children aged 16 and 17. Of course 16 and 17-year-olds can be, and are often, vulnerable. I ask the Minister is this a hard and fast rule, or will discretion be applied?

[Stuart C. McDonald]

Similarly, we are very troubled with the restrictions on nationality. For example, the exclusion of Eritreans is utterly inappropriate given that Home Office decision-making in this area has been torn to pieces in the tribunals. Surely, the grant rate will soon be back through the 75% threshold mentioned. Again, will some discretion be applied in this area? We share UNICEF's concerns that eligibility is restricted to those

“at risk of sexual exploitation.”

I have not yet heard an explanation of why those at risk of trafficking, forced labour and modern slavery are not to be included as well. As the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) said, this guidance relates to children in France. What input did the French Government have in setting these criteria, and when will we see guidance for other countries, especially Greece and Italy?

Finally, in relation to children and the Immigration Act, may I ask when the Secretary of State intends to extend the scope of the scheme for transferring responsibility for relevant children in order to include Scotland, under section 73 of the Immigration Act?

**Mr Goodwill:** May I suggest that the hon. Gentleman closely reads section 67, the Dubs amendment, as it makes it quite clear that it applies to refugee children. The reason why we are choosing these particular nationalities is that they are more likely to qualify for refugee status. He also talks about vulnerability. That is why we are addressing the issue of younger children. Indeed, we go further to make it clear that we must work with local authorities and, I am pleased to say, the devolved Governments around the country, to ensure that the capacity is there. This is all in the Dubs amendment, which is why we are discharging that amendment within not only the letter of the law, but the spirit as well.

**David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** In order to ensure that we are helping the most vulnerable children, can the Minister tell us whether those 300 who are coming over or have come over have undergone a proper age assessment and, if so, whether the results of that will be made available to Members of this House?

**Mr Goodwill:** The more than 300 children who have arrived since 10 October include 60 girls. Two hundred of those children would qualify under Dublin, of whom half have been reunited with family members here in the UK, and the other 100 would be Dubs children. Of the further children being transferred, a greater proportion will be Dubs children. When the children arrive at the assessment centre in Croydon or elsewhere, they will be assessed for age. There will have been an initial assessment based on appearance and demeanour, but if necessary a further age assessment can be undertaken using a Merton compliant process, a well-established process that social workers are used to using. Two social workers would have to refer a child for that process.

**Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab):** The Minister will know that I have supported him and the Home Secretary in the important work they have done to bring the first few hundred children over from Calais and from France, but not on this. I

remember the debates on the Dubs amendment and we did not discuss ruling out 13-year-old or 14-year-old Eritreans on an arbitrary basis. If this was simply priority guidance because we were going to prioritise the youngest children, people would understand, but why is he basing this on strict eligibility rules? I urge him to think again, turn this back into priority guidance, not eligibility guidance, and tell the House how many children he now thinks are going to come from France, because the number sounds considerably lower than the previous numbers that he and I discussed.

**Mr Goodwill:** We certainly expect many hundreds more children to be brought across from France under the criteria that we have set out. I must repeat that the Dubs amendment specifically refers to refugee children. Many of the children who may currently be in France would not qualify for refugee status, which is why for the older children we have set that criterion. For the other children, the risk of sexual exploitation indicates that they are likely to be the most vulnerable, as are the youngest children. Again, the children that we are bringing across as part of the 20,000 from Syria are the most needy children, in my view.

**James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con) rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** I am very glad that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry), after his earlier consternation and excitement, is now displaying veritably a Buddha-like calm.

**James Berry:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. Will my hon. Friend congratulate Kingston Council on being the first council to call for every council to take 50 Syrian refugees and on already meeting its quota of vulnerable minors? Does not that compassionate attitude on the part of Kingston and other Conservative councils show how ill-judged and wrong the bombastic comments of the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) were?

**Mr Goodwill:** I congratulate not only Conservative councils throughout the country but, to be fair, councils of all political affiliations that have stepped up to the mark. It is great that they understand their responsibility. There is potential in the legislation to mandate councils to take children. That has not been the case and I do not believe it will be. I am pleased that so many local authorities have entered into the spirit of this great humanitarian need and helped with children up and down the country.

**Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab):** When this matter was last before the House, I asked the Home Secretary about reports that the number of Home Office officials who were dealing with bringing these children to the United Kingdom had been doubled from one to two. She was not able to tell me whether that was correct, so can the Minister say today how many Home Office officials are dealing with bringing these children to the United Kingdom?

**Mr Goodwill:** We have dozens of Home Office officials on station. On the buses that were taking the children from the camp in Calais to the reception centres there were two Home Office officials, supported by interpreters

and social workers. We have stepped up the numbers that we have operating in Italy and Greece. We currently have 70 officials who have been allocated to Greece and 54 are already on station there.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): At the Dover and Kent frontline, our communities are looking after 750 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children—a quarter of the total. That is five times more than the whole of Scotland and 12 times more than the whole of Wales, while Wakefield is looking after just 22. Is it not time for either mandatory dispersal or more help for Kent?

**Mr Goodwill:** The national transfer scheme is working well. We have had 160 transfers. I do understand the pressure that Kent has been facing and I have met the leader of my hon. Friend's county council to discuss that. In response to concerns from local government, we have increased the rates that we give for the children being looked after, in some cases by as much as 33%. Some councils have been very helpful in opening up their books. We believe now that the funding that we have made available is sufficient to cover their additional costs.

**Thangam Debonnaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): I welcome the Minister's statement that he wants to increase support for Syrian children in Syria. May I press him on that? What specifically does he intend to urge on his ministerial colleagues in other Departments? Will he be urging aid to be transported into the berm—the no man's land between Syria and Jordan? Will he be urging the reopening of the border at Jarablus? What more will he be doing to make sure that aid gets to Syrians, who are so desperate?

**Mr Goodwill:** I was in Jordan last week, where I visited the Azraq refugee camp and met some of the people who had been transported from the berm. The Jordanian Government have concerns about some of the security aspects in the berm, particularly following the recent attack on their police forces. We continue to work with the Jordanians and others in the region to ensure that we can put people into a place of safety and, at the same time, maintain security. We have allocated £2.3 billion to assistance in the area, and I am proud of what we as a Government are doing as the second-biggest humanitarian donor in that region.

**Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Running through the Home Office guidance on the interpretation of section 67 is the legal test of the best interests of the children. Does my hon. Friend agree that in addition to that legal test, there is a wide-ranging assessment of the children, including their age, health needs, emotional needs, whether they have been victims of trafficking or trauma and any other family links? That is a reflection of the compassion and pragmatism that this Government are showing to these vulnerable children.

**Mr Goodwill:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The priority is to ensure that the best interests of the children are served. We need to demonstrate to the French authorities that, by bringing these children across to the UK, their best interests will be served. A number of criteria, including the ones that she mentioned, are taken into account.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): The Minister referred in his statement to the NGO work that was going on, particularly by volunteers, to help to resolve the issue. Have they reported to him any difficulty with the French authorities, as they try to ensure that children at risk are sheltered and helped as they try to make their way to the UK?

**Mr Goodwill:** I have not received any concerns about the facilities available in the 60 or so welcome centres that have been set up around France. Indeed, the conditions there are unbelievably better than the dreadful conditions that many people had to endure in the camps. I am pleased that in the interim, while these children's cases are being looked at and while we assess them against the Dubs and the Dublin criteria, they are in a place of safety and are being well looked after.

**Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): Will my hon. Friend update the House on the lead that this Government are taking in tackling the vile trade of people trafficking?

**Mr Goodwill:** Yes, indeed. Much of that dreadful trade is fuelled by the fact that the people traffickers seem to have no regard for people's safety. During the summer, I was in Nigeria talking to the authorities there, and they are very concerned about the way that people are putting their children's lives at risk by putting them into the hands of people traffickers. If and when the children arrive in Europe, the nightmare continues, particularly when they are pressed into modern slavery, or even worse in the case of some of the girls.

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): In the run-up to the closure of the so-called Jungle camp at Calais, there were reports of a thousand or more people disappearing from the camp and melting into the countryside. What work is the Minister doing with his counterparts in France to ensure that when the French authorities identify people who melted away from the Calais jungle and who have vulnerable children, they too can be included in this programme?

**Mr Goodwill:** I certainly received reports of some people leaving the camps as the clearance started. I also received reports of people coming back into the camps as they saw how that clearance was taking place. Indeed, some children who had been elsewhere in France arrived at the camps, hoping that they would be part of the scheme and could be relocated and considered under the Dubs and Dublin regulations. Unfortunately, those late arrivals were not considered in the same way. The advice that we always give to people is to claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach, and if not so, then to claim asylum in France, where they can be adequately processed.

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May I commend the Minister for the evidence he gave to the International Development Committee this week? Opposition parties might benefit from reading it, because he was very open and honest about what is happening. Will he confirm that any action taken by the Home Office in France must be approved by the French? Is it right that, until relatively recently, the French did not want Britain to take any children under the Dubs amendment for fear of creating a pull factor?

**Mr Goodwill:** I have to say that the French have been excellent partners in working through this. Of course, it was very difficult while the children were in the camp, and the clearance of the camp has been the opportunity we were all waiting for to make sure that those children who could be looked after and considered for relocation to the UK could be considered. I am full of admiration for the way that the French have worked with us in partnership, and I hope and feel sure that the children who are not coming to the UK will have a long and successful life in France, should their asylum claims be granted.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What provision is being made for counselling services for children who have experienced trauma and perhaps seen and experienced things that our own children have not?

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right: many of these children have experienced traumatic situations, not only perhaps in their host country, but certainly as part of their journey and their life in the camp. On 1 November, my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families and I issued a joint written ministerial statement on the safeguarding strategy for these children. The strategy includes a number of measures, including transfer procedures, safeguarding for family reunion, the information given to these children and revising the statutory guidance under the Dublin III arrangements. We will give regular updates to right hon. and hon. Members on how that is working out.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend think it extraordinary that, for months, the Labour party has not had a shadow Immigration Minister?

**Mr Goodwill:** I think that Labour has had a number of problems in that regard, but I will not revisit those issues.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): As a proud city of sanctuary, Sheffield is doing everything it can to house these very vulnerable children, but it is being held up by Home Office incompetence around the central assessment process. Will the Minister ensure that funding is released urgently to all local authorities and that concerns around the central assessment process are addressed?

**Mr Goodwill:** We certainly have addressed the funding issues. As I pointed out, there have been considerable increases. For example, children under the age of 16 will receive a 20% increase—that is £114 a day. The 16 and 17-year-olds will receive £91 a day. That is in response to the concerns raised by local authorities about the funding we have given. We are working with the Local Government Association, and we are content that the funding is appropriate to the expenditure authorities are being asked to make.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): I was pleased to hear the Minister's comments about the welcome centres in France. It cannot be in the interests of France, the UK or future refugees that the Calais Jungle and the dreadful conditions there get re-established. Does he believe that that can be prevented?

**Mr Goodwill:** Certainly, the French are absolutely determined that new camps will not spring up. As we saw, the conditions in the Jungle, and previously in Sangatte, are not ones that anybody should be expected to live in. The French do, I believe, have adequate resource to enable people who claim asylum to be looked after properly—particularly the children.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): My local authority, Hammersmith and Fulham, which has taken a lead on this, has not received the number of children it either offered to take or was told by the Home Office it would receive, because the Government have dragged their feet. Can the Minister give us some idea of how quickly assessments will take place of the children who are now dispersed across France, so that they can come here, because there are places for them to go to?

**Mr Goodwill:** It is great to know that there are places available. We must not forget that, despite the fact we have had around 318 children from France, in the year to June 2016, we had 3,472 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children arriving in the UK by other means. A lot of that has meant that local authorities, particularly in the areas where these children arrive—in the south-east, in particular—have had to rise to that challenge. I am pleased that we have made 160 transfers under the national transfer scheme. I know that local authorities that have capacity will use it as they see fit.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Minister will be aware that, last week, the Public Accounts Committee had a very interesting discussion about the support the Government have been offering as part of the relocation programme and about its effectiveness, and the shadow Minister might benefit from looking at that. Yesterday, a constituent emailed me offering to provide a home—as did the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)—to relocate a child. What work is the Home Office doing to make sure that such offers are taken up?

**Mr Goodwill:** Specifically, we have launched the community sponsorship scheme. In fact, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Archbishop of Canterbury launched it at Lambeth Palace—indeed, two Syrian families currently reside there. The community sponsorship scheme is more about local community groups working together with their local authorities to make sure people can be looked after than about people going into somebody's spare bedroom. If those people who wish to help could become engaged with, perhaps, a faith group or another group in their area, I am sure that they would be able to put forward a bid under the community sponsorship scheme.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Citizens UK has warned that the new guidelines make it impossible for the Government to fulfil their promise to take half the unaccompanied children from the former camp. Is it correct that that promise will be met in full? If not, what proportion of those children do the Government now expect to take into this country?

**Mr Goodwill:** As I pointed out, we are assessing children against the criteria we have laid out, and we expect to bring several hundred more children here, as is our responsibility under section 67 of the Immigration Act 2016.

**Craig Whittaker** (Calder Valley) (Con): Contrary to the bluster from the Opposition Front Bench, my hon. Friend the Minister is working tirelessly on this issue, as indeed did his predecessor. Knowing that we have a severe lack of carers, and particularly foster carers, in our area, Yorkshire, will my hon. Friend explain what the Government are doing to ensure that there is a fair distribution of caring responsibilities for unaccompanied children right across the UK?

**Mr Goodwill:** Some of the bluster we have heard from the Opposition Front Bench is not reflected in the very practical and constructive way that Labour local authorities have been working up and down the country. One aspect of the safeguarding strategy we launched on 1 November was, indeed, looking at the demand for foster care and its availability. Many local authorities have raised concerns that they do not have sufficient capacity for fostering, and they have had to place children out of area, which has incurred additional costs, particularly if agencies are being used. We do need to improve the capacity for fostering, and I would say to anybody out in the country who fancies a career in fostering that it is a very rewarding career and one we would be very pleased to see more people stepping forward to take up.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Can the Minister explain how he determines which children are at risk of sexual exploitation? What criteria are used? Who does the assessment? How confident is he about its reliability? I should have thought that any of the children we are discussing today would be at risk of sexual exploitation.

**Mr Goodwill:** The main criterion we would look at is gender, as we know that girls are more likely to be victims of sexual exploitation, but if any other individuals were in that category, they would also be considered.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): How many criminal gangs that have been exploiting these young people in Calais have been stopped due to our co-operation with France? What have we learned from those arrests in terms of the future safety of our borders?

**Mr Goodwill:** There have been a number of interceptions in France of these criminal gangs, and I am pleased to say that the number of interceptions has increased. Indeed, we have also had arrests in the United Kingdom,

some of which have come to court. This is something we are very determined to address. These criminal gangs profit from people's misery, and they must be prevented from doing so.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Amnesty International has found that children as young as 16 have been indefinitely conscripted into the army in Eritrea. I would gently suggest to the Minister that that is not a pull factor in terms of the attractiveness of the United Kingdom, so will he urgently review the arbitrary decision to exclude Eritreans over the age of 12 from these criteria?

**Mr Goodwill:** I have already mentioned the criteria we use, but I am well aware of the conscription situation. A number of EU countries, as well as our Home Office officials, continue to look at that situation, which is not a good one, in Eritrea.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I add my thanks to the Minister for his statement and update. I also echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), who is no longer in her place, and recommend that people read the Minister's contribution to the International Development Committee yesterday. In working closely with the French to accelerate the process of identifying and bringing eligible children to the UK, will he confirm that the appropriate security checks will continue to be undertaken?

**Mr Goodwill:** The assessment that takes place when children are processed includes a security assessment. Indeed, in terms of the children and families that we are bringing across from Syria, that is a central part of what we do to ensure that we are kept safe, while addressing the real humanitarian need in the region.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Will the Minister re-explain the rationale about not accepting unaccompanied 16 and 17-year-olds under Dubs? Will he reassure us that that is not a reaction to his Back Benchers making outrageous demands for teeth examinations?

**Mr Goodwill:** The criteria that we use look particularly at vulnerability. In terms of sexual exploitation, that is gender neutral. People are referred to us by the French, and their process is gender neutral as well.

## Points of Order

1.21 pm

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On two occasions during Prime Minister's questions, the Prime Minister suggested that the Scottish National party campaigned during the independence referendum to leave the European Union single market. That is untrue. We campaigned to remain in the EU, including the single market. That is not a matter of speculation or debate; it is a matter of fact. What powers do you have, Mr Speaker, to ensure that no one in this House, including the Prime Minister, can mislead the House, however inadvertently, when the facts are clear?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, both for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. I have heard what he has said and my response is as follows: it is the responsibility of each and every Member of the House faithfully to communicate what he or she regards as facts and to take responsibility for their own statements. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I do not think that it is right for me to be drawn into the matter any further. I understand entirely what he has said. I think that I also understand the Prime Minister's position in relation to Scotland's status within the United Kingdom and what the alternative to that status might entail. Therefore, notwithstanding the hon. Gentleman's insistence that the matter is a straightforward one of facts, as with many things the situation lends itself to a number of different interpretations. If any Minister, including the Prime Minister, thinks that she has erred and needs to correct the record, it is incumbent on the Member to do so. Meanwhile, the hon. Gentleman can go about his business with an additional glint in his eye and spring in his step, in the safe knowledge that he has articulated his concerns and that they are on the record, both for the people of Scotland and for the world to see.

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Today's calendar of business shows no Government business for Monday 21 November. Rumour has it that it will be the Higher Education and Research Bill and the Clerks have been told that the amendment deadline is tonight. Members are gifted, but they are not psychic. Can you do anything, Mr Speaker, to clarify what is clearly an unsatisfactory situation?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Members are gifted, but, as he rightly observes, they are not psychic. However, I hope that he will not take great umbrage if I remind the House and communicate to the world the fact that he does at least have the advantage of being a noted philosopher. That may aid him in seeking to decipher matters, or it may not avail him. We shall see.

I had not heard bruited what apparently has winged its way to the hon. Gentleman about the likely business for next Monday. Admittedly, I had not inquired about that business. It may be so. In general terms, it is clearly desirable for the House to have the maximum possible notice of upcoming business. It is, in all likelihood, going to fall to the Leader of the House at business questions on Thursday to specify Monday's business.

What I will say to the hon. Gentleman in respect of the point about the deadline for amendments is this: I, from the Chair, always seek, within such powers as I have, to facilitate the House. If the House ends up being disadvantaged by lack of notice, it is open to the Chair to consider, exceptionally, manuscript amendments. I make the point and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, who is a sagacious and perceptive fellow, will have got it.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you advise me on how it would be in order to put on the record the widespread anger felt in Torbay at the theft over the weekend of poppy boxes belonging to the Torquay branch of the Royal British Legion? While thousands attended remembrance services, some light-fingered thieves stole boxes that had been positioned in a number of shops in the centre of Torquay. It is the actions of the thousands of people who supported the appeal, the hundreds of people who helped to with the collection and the people who diligently run the Torbay poppy appeal that should be remembered, not the actions of a handful of thieves.

**Mr Speaker:** That is not a point of order, as the barely concealed grin of the hon. Gentleman in raising the matter eloquently testifies. Nevertheless, what I will say to the hon. Gentleman, who is certainly a quick learner in the House, because he entered only last year, is that, as he knows, he has now found his own salvation. I have a feeling that his clarification in the Chamber may well communicate itself, or be communicated, to media outlets across Torbay and possible elsewhere.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At Prime Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister alluded to a written ministerial statement to be published later today on the fate of hundreds of UK citizens—in other words, on whether or not the Chagos islanders will finally be granted their right to return. That written statement has yet to make an appearance, but the Government's decision has been reported all over the morning papers, and apparently that decision is to maintain the 40-year injustice. Is it in order for us to read about Government policy in the papers before it has been reported to this House? What opportunities are available to us to question Ministers on such disappointing decisions?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer is that it is up to the Government to decide whether the matter warrants an oral statement or a written statement, and that is not for the Chair to judge. What I will say to the hon. Gentleman, however, is that it is highly undesirable for there to be a significant time lag between public disclosure and parliamentary opportunity. He will know that other business has so far occupied us today. But that is true of today. The written statement that he legitimately anticipates has not yet been made. Doubtless it will be, and that may well lead Members to want to raise the matter in coming days, particularly if there has been no substantial parliamentary discussion of it beyond the brief exchange at Prime Minister's questions. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be ready to explore what utensils are available to him.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Are you able to give me any advice regarding incidents in my constituency? I have been contacted by a number of my constituents regarding letters that they have received from the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) about the Boundary Commission's proposals. Some of my constituents have been left confused, given the subject matter, believing that their MP has already changed under boundary changes. Given that the hon. Gentleman gave me no notice of his activities in my constituency, may I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, and for notifying me in advance of her intention to raise it. Moreover, I gather that she did notify the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris), who is in his place. He can hear what I have to say, and we can judge whether it requires any further comment today.

What I will say to the hon. Lady is that this is not a point of order relating to conduct in the Chamber. That said, as Members who have been here for a long time know, the Speaker will always encourage Members to observe the usual courtesies in informing others if they intend to visit, for political purposes, other colleagues' constituencies, and they should do so in a timely way. I think the point about visiting is also applicable to communication with another Member's constituents. The truth of the matter is that, especially in the run-up to potential boundary changes, there have often been, if I may put it this way—I do not mean this disoblingly—spats of this kind. It is much better if such spats are avoided, and the whole House and all its Members benefit if these courtesies are observed.

If the hon. Gentleman particularly wants to say anything—I am not sure that the nation needs to hear it—as I have heard from the hon. Lady, I am happy briefly to hear him as well.

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The nation may not want to hear this, but my constituents will do. I have not written to the hon. Lady's constituents by name or used parliamentary paper, resources or a portcullis emblem. I also did not deliver any of the letters personally, as I was away on parliamentary business out of the country at the time. I have therefore not breached any protocol. As far as the views that have been expressed are concerned, they are the views of my constituents and I am representing them as their Member of Parliament. Their responses to the letter concur with the opinion of both sides, which is that we should keep Morecambe and Lancaster separate.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his response. I note what he says about not using parliamentary notepaper and so on. We are certainly

most grateful for that, because that would have been very wrong. I thank him for being characteristically up-front.

What I would say to the hon. Gentleman, for the benefit of all Members, is that we have to take responsibility for conduct in our name by our staff or volunteers who are, or might reasonably be thought to be, acting on our behalf. Beyond that, I have no wish to intrude into this matter, and I hope that people of good will who represent neighbouring constituencies and who are doing their honest best can try to observe these courtesies. I have a sense that that is what the public would expect of us, or—let me put it this way—that that is what the public would like to be able to expect of us.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): Say sorry!

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Turner, your chuntering from a sedentary position, "Say sorry!" does at least represent a welcome change from your usual sedentary utterance, which several times a week, as you know, tends to be: "Shocking! It is a disgrace." That does not render it any more orderly, however. We will leave the matter there for now, and I thank colleagues for what they have said.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### COMMONWEALTH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 50)*

Secretary Priti Patel, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr David Gauke, Rory Stewart and James Wharton, presented a Bill to amend the amount of the limit in section 15 of the Commonwealth Development Corporation Act 1999 on the Government's financial assistance.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 93) with explanatory notes (Bill 93-EN).*

### CLEAN AIR BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Geraint Davies Bill presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to set, measure, enforce and report on air quality targets; to require that vehicle emissions targets and testing reflect on-road driving conditions; to make it an offence to remove permanently devices that reduce vehicle emissions; to provide powers for local authorities to establish low diesel emissions zones and pedestrian-only areas; to restrict the use of diesel vehicles in urban areas; to make provision about the promotion of electric and hydrogen powered vehicles and for the development of sustainable public, private and commercial transport by road, rail, air and sea; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 December, and to be printed (Bill 94).*

## Feeding Products for Babies and Children (Advertising and Promotion)

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

1.34 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to control advertising and promotion of feeding products for babies and children; to establish arrangements to set standards for the efficacy of products and to measure claims against those standards; to make provision about penalties for advertisers and promoters who do not meet the standards; and for connected purposes.

We all expect the food we consume to be safe. We would like to hope that the standard of that food is monitored and that the advertising that tries to encourage us to buy it is accurate; should that not be the case, we would hope that the companies involved would be punished for misleading us. We expect our health professionals to be knowledgeable, and we expect them to be able to give impartial advice on foods from a position of expertise. We expect parents to have access to information so that they can make informed choices about how they feed the most vulnerable and precious people in our society: babies and young children.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. The present means of regulating products intended for babies and children—the infant formula and follow-on formula regulations—has loopholes and is not enforced in any meaningful way. That is the reason why I have brought this ten-minute rule Bill to the House, and it is why I seek the support of hon. and right hon. Members today.

The Bill I wish to bring in would tighten controls on the advertising and promotion of infant and young child formula. Under the present regulations, the advertising of formula intended for babies under six months is not permitted, so formula manufacturers have instead focused their efforts on promoting follow-on milks. Such products are heavily promoted on TV and in the media with soft-focus visuals of cute babies. Looking at the products on a supermarket shelf, it is clear that they are branded in a similar way so that parents get the impression that a child will progress from one to the next. They are numbered from one through to three or four. The branding is very distinctive and attractive—golden, with shields, crowns and cute animals. This is a growing market, and competition is fierce.

Dr Nigel Rollins from the Department of Maternal, Newborn, Child & Adolescent Health at the World Health Organisation recently predicted that the market value of the formula industry would reach US \$70.6 billion by 2019. The majority of growth in the sector comes from follow-on and toddler milks, but the truth is that those products are not necessary. They have emerged because of the tightening of regulations around formula intended for babies aged zero to six months. They are marketed on TV, in print and online as important for child development, but many agencies globally are concerned about their high sugar content, and young children will receive all the nutrients they require from a healthy, balanced diet. I am concerned that parents are not hearing that message and that there is an impact on family budgets as a result.

Infant formula milks are not cheap. The size of the containers is getting smaller while the cost is increasing. As a rough guide, the price of a tin of infant formula can range from £8.50 to £14. Ready-prepared milks are even more expensive, and using one of the brand leaders in the first week of life could cost a family more than £100. Certain heavily advertised niche brands can cost nearly £23 for 900 grams of powdered formula. For a baby in the first six months of life, one of those tins of formula might last around a week.

As hon. Members can imagine, the cost can have a significant impact on household budgets. If families do not have access to impartial information about the content and merits of infant and young child formula, they make the decision on which product to choose by the way in which formula is presented on the shelves and by the marketing produced by formula companies. They might well consider the most expensive formula to be the best. I do not believe that formula companies are providing good enough and transparent enough information to allow parents to make an informed decision. That is being left to small charities such as First Steps Nutrition Trust, which has excellent guides to infant formula on its website. We do not have any independent analysis to check whether the information provided by the companies about their products is accurate.

The Mintel baby food and drink report from April 2016 notes that one of the main factors determining parental choice of milk is “brand”. It is not well enough known that all formula milks have to be of a very similar composition to comply with the requirements set by the EU, and claims are made primarily for unnecessary ingredients. Most of the rest of the difference is simply in the label and the branding, which parents are paying for: companies spent about £23 for every baby born in the UK on marketing follow-on formula in 2015. Given the disproportionate prevalence of bottle feeding in less affluent areas, the poorest families in our society are losing out the most. The Government should act to protect their interests.

This is an area in which one might expect health professionals to be able to help. Unfortunately, their ability to do so is constantly undermined by formula companies and by the lack of support, funding and leadership from Government in protecting them via legislation. There is a significant loophole in the regulations, which means that all infant formulas, for use from birth, can be advertised

“in a scientific publication, or...for the purposes of trade prior to the retail stage, in a publication of which the intended readership is other than the general public”.

That includes adverts in professional medical and health journals that health professionals will read. Dr Helen Crawley of First Steps Nutrition Trust, who is doing a great deal of work in this area, recently published a report called “Scientific and Factual? A review of breastmilk substitute advertising to health professionals”, which analysed some of the claims made in advertising to healthcare professionals. Many of the headline health claims made cannot be substantiated. The sources they cite are not in line with health policy, graphs set out to mislead and the adverts may fail to meet the Government’s requirement for such claims to be supported by peer-reviewed work. Even more frustratingly, the adverts cannot be challenged, as they could be in any other

publication, by taking the matter to the Advertising Standards Authority, and that is just not fair. The intent of these adverts is to influence health professionals, who are the first line of support to families, but families need proper, independent information. The Bill would aim to tighten up this loophole and protect the integrity of health professionals from misleading claims.

The Bill proposes arrangements for controlling claims. Claims in adverts are challenged successfully and regularly by organisations such as Baby Milk Action. At present, claims can be made by formula companies for ingredients that are not necessary. For example, there is a global trend at the moment to add probiotics to formula, and for many years companies in this country have made claims about prebiotics in formula, which scientific authorities say have no benefit. There may also be issues with the degrading of formula composition over time, but we just do not have any information about that. Formulas can sit on the shelf for years, and we do not know what the impact of that is. There is no independent verification of formula composition or of claims. Furthermore, the Government take no formal national role in testing and monitoring all infant formulas to ensure that the products are safe and meet compositional regulations. I think parents would be quite shocked to find out that this is the case. These products are chosen with care to give to our youngest citizens in this country, and I propose that the Government give serious consideration to making improvements in this area.

Lastly, I wish to turn to penalties. There have been no prosecutions under the current regulations since 2003, despite numerous flagrant breaches. Under the present regulations, contravention or failure to comply is an offence liable, on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, which is a fine of

up to £5,000. Given the size and scale of the companies and of the industry, that level of fine barely registers. We should contrast this with Romania, which has recently signalled its intent to bring in a new law banning the promotion of infant formula products for children up to the age of two. Breaching the rules will constitute a criminal offence, with fines of up to 100,000 Romanian new leu, the equivalent of about £19,000. This would be a step in the right direction and would put down a marker to formula companies that failure to comply is not going to lead to a mere slap on the wrists.

The World Health Assembly resolution adopted in May 2016 clarified that all infant milks marketed as a breastmilk substitute in the first three years of life should be covered by the WHO code, the international code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, including follow-on formula, toddler milks and other milks. The House has an opportunity today to make progress on this important public health recommendation.

I am grateful to colleagues from both sides of the House who have put their names to this Bill for their support. I would be glad to have the opportunity to consider other aspects of this issue should the House give me leave to bring in the Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Alison Thewliss, Dr Sarah Wollaston, Mrs Flick Drummond, Dr Philippa Whitford, Jim Shannon, Caroline Lucas, Patrick Grady, Julie Elliott, Mark Durkan and Kirsty Blackman present the Bill.

Alison Thewliss accordingly presented the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 February 2017, and to be printed (Bill 95).*

## Opposition Day

[12<sup>TH</sup> ALLOTTED DAY]

### Autumn Statement Distributional Analysis, Universal Credit and ESA

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

1.44 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the £3.4 billion reductions to the work allowance element of universal credit and the £1.4 billion reductions to employment and support allowance; calls on the Government to reverse those reductions; and further calls on the Government to reintroduce detailed distributional analysis for the Autumn Statement and all further Financial Statements, as was done between 2010 and 2015.

On a solemn note, I wish to send my condolences to the family and friends of Debbie Jolly. Some Members may have known Debbie, who was a disability campaigner. Over the years, she provided briefings for many Members of the House of Commons and, through Disabled People Against Cuts, was involved in many of the various lobbies of Parliament. She passed away last week, and I would like to send our condolences to her family and all her friends. We all hoped she would survive long enough at least to see this debate. I pay tribute to her for the work she did.

I want to explain the genesis of the motion that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends have tabled for today's debate. As we all know, the autumn statement is a week today. Traditionally, we would have held an Opposition day debate and used it to have a wide-ranging debate, second-guessing and commenting on what we predicted would be contained in the autumn statement.

This year, we want to try something different. We want to break radically with that tradition, because next week could be the last chance to head off what is shaping up to be quite a harmful disaster for many low earners and many vulnerable people in our society. For our debates today, we have taken two significant issues that are contained in the Budget plans announced earlier this year by the Chancellor's predecessor, and which the new Chancellor has the ability and opportunity to intervene upon and, we hope, reverse. The first is the plan to cut the work allowance element of universal credit and employment and support allowance, and for the later debate we have chosen the issue of funding social care.

We believe that the Chancellor, by withdrawing the proposed cuts to ESA and universal credit, would dramatically beneficially impact upon the lives of many, many of our fellow citizens, who are, yes, low earners, but many of whom, also through their disability, are also often the poorest and most vulnerable in our society. We want to see today and, yes, over the next week, whether we can assemble across the House a coalition of pressure that can decisively influence the Chancellor to think again.

I welcome the Back-Bench debate that has been secured for tomorrow, which I believe will contribute to forming that coalition; I certainly believe and hope that we can succeed in doing so. So the appeal to hon. Members today and in the coming week is to do all we can to prevail upon the Chancellor to halt the policy of cuts to universal credit and ESA contained in the Budget introduced by the former Chancellor, which are planned to come into effect on 1 April.

Before I come to the grounds for making this appeal to the Chancellor, it is important to understand the origins of the proposals, and this goes to the heart of the autumn statement process. I believe their origins lie in the mistake by the last Chancellor of imposing a fiscal framework on his colleagues that was simply impractical, given the economic circumstances that we were facing, and certainly what we are about to face. If the fiscal framework is wrongly set and, importantly, if it so inflexible that it cannot reflect the realities and challenges of the economy, then decisions on both tax and spending equally fail to reflect the economic realities and meet the new economic priorities. I believe that in this instance, the fiscal framework imposed by the former Chancellor was so inflexible, and unworkable in the end, that it totally failed to meet the economic targets he set for it. It is also vital to understand that the former Chancellor's fiscal framework imposed on his colleagues' Departments, unrealistic constraints that are undermining their ability to achieve their own policy goals.

**Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): The reality is that the fiscal framework did see a significant reduction in the annual deficit. That is a good thing for this country. I have not seen anything from Labour Members to suggest that they would have been able to do anything like that.

**John McDonnell:** The hon. Gentleman clearly has not been listening. We introduced a fiscal credibility target, which would have built in the flexibility that we need—and actually, which his colleagues would have benefited from as they sought to deliver the goals set out in the manifesto upon which they were elected. That is the critical problem—that this fiscal target has become unworkable. Next week, most probably, we will see that not only will it be reset, but large elements of it will be scrapped; and some of those political disputes within the Government will be seen to have been completely unnecessary if only the Chancellor, at that stage, had listened not just to us, but to some of his own colleagues.

On the Government's own economic metrics, the fiscal framework has failed. I remind the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) that the former Chancellor's target was to eliminate the deficit by 2015. The deficit remained at over £45 billion in the first six months of this financial year. I remind the House that his target was to reduce the debt. The debt now stands at £1.7 trillion and has increased over the past six years, according to the latest estimate, by £740 billion. I believe that the biggest failure was to ignore the needs of the real economy and use the fiscal framework to constrain investment. The failure to invest on the scale needed to modernise our economy resulted in stagnating productivity.

In the face of all the evidence that the fiscal framework was not working and not achieving its target, the decision to set a target for the framework not just to eliminate the deficit, but to produce a multibillion-pound surplus

by 2019-20 demonstrated to many of us how far the former Chancellor's politics was overriding sound economics. The result of his setting targets even more removed from reality was that he imposed on his own colleagues the task of scrambling round to find a scale of cuts that, in many instances, undermined what chance they had to implement the policies on which they were elected and their long-standing ambitions, some of which could have secured cross-party support.

That was no more evident than at the Department for Work and Pensions. For the Treasury to demand cuts to universal credit that would take, on average, £2,100 out of the incomes of people who were doing all that was asked of them—working all they could to come off benefits, bringing up their families, contributing to society—flew in the face of all that the universal credit system was meant to be about. The same can be said of the cuts of nearly £30 a week to employment and support allowance. That is an extremely significant cut to the incomes of disabled people who are also doing all that has been asked of them—seeking work to lift them off benefits, and overcome their disabilities and conditions.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): On the ESA cut, does my right hon. Friend recall that at the time it was being taken through the House, we were assured that the Government would introduce an ambitious plan to reduce—indeed, to halve—the disability employment gap by 2020? Does he share my dismay that that goal has been abandoned completely?

**John McDonnell**: I recall my right hon. Friend advising the Government of the unreality of their proposals at the time. What worried us all was that, on the one hand, benefits were being reduced, but the support was not being put in place by which those people could gain work and supplement their incomes.

I understood the motivation of the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) when he resigned. The overriding demands of the Treasury were undermining the policy goals he was seeking to implement. He rightly objected to a further burden being placed on the social security budget, especially at a time when new, long-planned systems were at the early stages of introduction. I understood then his sense of frustration, and I understand now why he and many of his hon. Friends have called on the new Chancellor to look again at the burden that is being placed on the welfare budget and the threat, above all else, that it poses to the successful roll-out of universal credit and the policy of supporting disabled people into work.

The planned cuts are more than a threat to the implementation of policies long advocated and cherished by many Government Members. More importantly, they are a threat to the livelihoods, living standards and quality of life of millions of low earners and some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our communities. The Government have sought to judge themselves on their own set of economic metrics: eliminating the deficit, reducing the debt and adhering to a cap on welfare spending. On all their own metrics, they have failed. However, there is an alternative and very basic set of metrics on which a Government should be judged—whether they ensure that their population is adequately fed, decently housed and kept warm in winter, and has sufficient income through employment or a support safety net to have a decent quality of life.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend is laying out a powerful case for the need to make some very different decisions next week in the interest of all our futures. There is clearly a combined moral and economic rationale for an urgent focus on disability employment. The 30% disability employment gap makes that even more important. Does my right hon. Friend agree that people with disabilities and their families deserve so much more from the Government, who should be on their side, rather than pursuing a strategy characterised by cuts to ESA, the tragic failure of work capability assessments and no strategy for fairness?

**John McDonnell**: I fully agree with my hon. Friend. There is a week in which we can overturn at least an element of that brutality. This week, we need to seize upon the chance as best we can, across parties, to deliver change.

From our privileged position in this House, I firmly believe that before we consider cuts to basic support for low earners and disabled people, we have a moral duty, as my hon. Friend said, to fully appreciate the plight of many of our fellow citizens and the impact that any changes that are forced upon them could have. There are some basic facts that we need to face up to—basic facts that depict the harsh reality of the lives of so many members of our community. Nearly 4 million of our children are living in poverty. The scandal is that two thirds of them live in families where someone is working. Thanks to low wages, zero-hours contracts and forced or bogus self-employment, which has been exposed today, the promise that work will lift people out of poverty is a broken one for many.

If a basic responsibility of the Government is to ensure that their population is adequately fed and housed, they are failing. A million emergency food parcels were given out by food banks last year to families who did not have sufficient income to feed themselves. The latest reports confirm that the numbers are rising. This year, 200,000 children in our country will be dependent on a food bank to get a decent meal at Christmas. One survey reported that more than 20% of parents had regularly not eaten so that their children could eat. Others report the frequent choice between eating and heating. This is 2016.

On the duty on the Government to ensure that people are adequately housed, they are failing again. Rough sleeping has doubled in recent years. The equivalent of 100 households a day are evicted from rented homes—a near-record 40,000 in the year to date. Some 1.2 million households are stuck on council housing waiting lists. In my constituency tonight, there will be families sleeping in beds in sheds that have been rented to them.

As for the Government's responsibility for disabled people, as the UN report concisely summed it up, the Government have—and I quote—systematically or gravely violated the rights of disabled people. Independent research suggested that Government efforts to push people off claiming disability benefits have been associated with more than 500 people committing suicide in three years.

Three years ago, I led a debate following the presentation of the War on Welfare petition, which highlighted the call for an overall impact assessment of the Government's policies on disabled people. I cited the immense human

[John McDonnell]

suffering caused by the brutal implementation of the work capability assessment and the latest round of cuts to benefits and care services. I cited examples of people who had tragically taken their own lives in despair following the WCA and the penalisation through sanctions. We now know that those suicides were not isolated examples, but that there have been hundreds.

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): Of course, there is a double whammy, because people who are suffering and being punished in that way are not likely to get access to good mental health services or NHS services, because those are being cut and wound down across the country as well.

**John McDonnell:** I have listened carefully to the Prime Minister's responses to a number of questions about cuts to mental health services at Prime Minister's Question Time. I hope that her commitment to social justice will result in the reversing of some of those cuts, particularly to mental health walk-in services, which were raised at the Prime Minister's questions session before last.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The shadow Chancellor mentioned what happened three years ago. He will probably remember, as I do, that the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who was the Labour party's spokesman at the time, pledged that Labour would be "tougher than the Tories" on benefits.

Bringing things more up to date, many people in the ESA work-related activity group have told me that the current support package—a visit to the jobcentre once every six months—is completely inadequate. Does the shadow Chancellor agree that that shows a system that urgently needs reform?

**John McDonnell:** I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman. There needs to be more support, and that was promised but has not been delivered. At the same time, benefits have been taken away, so as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) said, there has been a double whammy in the impact on disabled people. That demoralises people who are under pressure, losing benefits and not getting support, which pushes them into an even worse position.

I have raised this issue before, but we now have better figures than we had two or three years ago. We now know that between 2011 and 2014, more than 2,000 people who were assessed in a work capability assessment as being capable of work died before they could even take up that work. Surely we have to learn the lessons from that evidence, and surely one lesson is that if we impose further cuts on people who are already struggling, not only will we increase the deprivation and suffering that they endure, but many of them will see no light at the end of the tunnel and will simply despair.

The WOW debate was intended simply to ensure that any impact of decisions on benefits was properly assessed. We called for a cumulative impact assessment to be published, and we asked for a detailed impact assessment of every policy to be published for the House before a final decision was made. In a supposed post-truth environment, I still believe that evidence-based policy

making is worth aiming for. That is why it is critical that the Government also restore the distributional analysis of their proposals, and ensure that it is intelligible and usable.

Before scrapping that analysis entirely, the Chancellor's predecessor took to publishing figures that disguised the real impact of his policies. That accusation is not mine but that of one of his old colleagues, the former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the former Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey. If the Treasury is to restore public trust, it must not just let the House know when it will publish the distributional analysis, but ensure that the figures are published clearly and without any attempts to massage or spin them. Only in that way will we be able to test the fairness and equity of policy proposals.

In my view and that of many Members, when the cuts were first introduced they reflected a grotesque unfairness, because at the same time the Government were cutting taxes for some of the wealthiest in our country and for large corporations. [Interruption.] Capital gains tax, inheritance tax—how many more examples do we need? That was a strange priority to many Members on both sides of the House. As the Resolution Foundation has pointed out, reversing just some of those tax cuts could render the cuts to benefits unnecessary. The last Chancellor also had a penchant for absorbing budget gaps at various times.

There is a real opportunity next week for the Chancellor to live up to the Prime Minister's spoken commitment to tackle social injustice. We believe that the Chancellor will reset the fiscal framework in next week's autumn statement. He has already adjusted it. That will allow him the flexibility he needs to reverse the cuts. I appeal to hon. Members throughout the House to help us lift the threat of further cuts from families and disabled people. We have a week to achieve that, and we can start today by supporting the motion.

2.4 pm

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and add:

"notes the role of universal credit in ensuring that work pays; welcomes the £60 million package of additional employment support announced in the Summer Budget 2016 available to new claimants with limited capability for work from April 2017 and set out in the recent Work and Health Green Paper; further welcomes the proposals for employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions set out in that green paper; and notes the comments by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Treasury Committee on 19 October 2016 on his intention to publish distributional analysis at the forthcoming Autumn Statement."

Since 2010, we have been working to get the country's finances in order while continuing to provide proper financial and practical support to those who need it. We will have to wait until next week to hear the Chancellor's plans, but we can note today the significant progress on which the autumn statement will build. In 2010, we faced an economy that was barely growing, investment that was low, unemployment that was high, and a deficit at a level not seen since the second world war. In 2009-10, the then Labour Government were borrowing an annually recurring amount of nearly £6,000 for every household in the country—an unsustainable situation.

Since then, Conservative-led Governments have taken the tough decisions needed to reduce the deficit, and it is working. Over the past six years, we have cut the deficit by almost two thirds from its 2009-10 post-war peak of 10.1% of GDP to 4% last year.

**Robert Ffello:** It is funny, because I remember being in the House and being told that the deficit was going to be cut—wiped out, gone—by 2015, and Labour’s plan to halve it by 2015 being dismissed as nonsense. Does the Minister have the same recollection?

**Damian Hinds:** The hon. Gentleman, who is a man of great memory, will also remember the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman shouting “Too far, too fast” over and over. We embarked on a determined programme to get our nation’s finances back in order, which the Opposition opposed at every turn. They voted against essentially all the substantial measures to get us there.

**Robert Ffello:** I also remember, in the run-up to 2008, Conservative Members saying from the Opposition Benches that the Labour Government needed to spend more on hospitals, spend more on schools—spend more, spend more, spend more. Funny how they have forgotten that.

**Damian Hinds:** They have not forgotten that, and it is because we are getting our nation’s finances back in order that we can afford to increase our funding for the national health service by £10 billion, in line with what the NHS itself has deemed necessary in the five year forward view, a plan that it would never have been possible to realise had the Labour party been in government.

The Opposition claim that the poorest in our society have borne the brunt of the reductions in the deficit, but that is not the case. It is undeniable that when we face a deficit of almost £6,000 for every family in the country, we have to do some difficult things, but people throughout society have contributed to getting our finances back in order. We have never seen tackling the deficit as just an option. It is a matter of social justice, because when Governments lose control of the public finances, with all that flows from that, it is invariably those who have the least who stand to lose the most.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): Is it not the case that a distributional analysis cannot capture the impact that things such as capital gains tax cuts have on the wider economy by encouraging entrepreneurs to create jobs and wealth so that we can pay our way in the world, which is what we have to do if we are to afford schools, hospitals and all the rest of it?

**Damian Hinds:** My hon. Friend is of course right. There is always a dynamic effect of changes in taxation. I will come on to the question of the distributional analysis, because when we look at it we see that it is rather different from what the shadow Chancellor suggested.

**John McDonnell:** May I remind the Minister of what the Institute for Fiscal Studies said about the Government’s changes? It stated that the long-run effect of tax and benefit changes in last year’s autumn statement, which were translated into the Budget, would be percentage losses around 25 times larger for those in the bottom decile than for those in the top decile.

**Damian Hinds:** The programme of deficit reduction has always been done in a fair as well as a determined way. At the end of this decade, the best-off fifth of households—the best-off quintile—will be paying a greater proportion of total taxes than in 2010-11; in fact, they will be paying more in tax than the rest of the households put together. That means that those with the broadest shoulders are, quite rightly, paying their fair share towards fiscal consolidation. Meanwhile, the plans the Government have set out lead to a projected distribution of public spending between the income groups that is essentially the same as in 2010. As the distributional analysis published alongside the last Budget showed, the poorest will continue to receive a share of spending on benefits in 2019-20 similar to that in 2010-11. I reassure the House that the Chancellor has committed to publishing a distributional analysis alongside the forthcoming autumn statement.

Government reforms to incentivise work and enable those who are just about managing to keep more of their pay packet include the national living wage, increases to the personal allowance, the doubling of free childcare, action on council tax and freezes to fuel duty. Although we have had to make difficult decisions on welfare spending, we have never lost sight of the fact that the most sustainable route out of poverty and just managing is to get into and progress in work. The introduction of the national living wage means that lower-paid workers are now seeing record increases to their earnings.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Minister explain to our constituents how the introduction of the “pay to stay” policy will help incentivise people to get into work?

**Damian Hinds:** I was in the middle of talking about how wages have been rising. If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I thought that she was challenging me on that point, so I will continue to make it. According to recent data on earnings from the Office for National Statistics, the lowest 5% of workers saw their wages grow by more than 6% in 2016, the highest growth for that group since that statistical series began nearly 20 years ago. Based on the Office for Budget Responsibility’s forecast at the Budget, almost 3 million low-wage workers are expected to benefit directly by 2020, with many more benefiting from the ripple effect on income distribution.

At the same time, universal credit is transforming the welfare system to ensure that it always pays to work more and to earn more. That is in stark contrast with the pre-2010 system, in which in-work poverty increased by 20% between 1998 and 2010, despite welfare spending on people in work increasing by £28 billion. Evidence is already showing that people move into work faster under universal credit; for every 100 people who found work under the old jobseeker’s allowance system, 113 universal credit claimants have moved into a job. We estimate that universal credit will generate around £7 billion in economic benefit every year and boost employment by up to 300,000 once fully rolled out.

Most important of all, universal credit will drive progression, delivering sustainable outcomes for low-income families. Unlike tax credits, with the 16-hour cliff edge, it supports part-time and flexible working—as well as full-time working—adjusting on a month-by-month basis

[Damian Hinds]

according to household income. The work allowances are just one element of a much wider system of support and incentives. The personalised work coach support, the smooth taper rate and the reimbursement of 85% of childcare costs as soon as someone starts working, even for a small number of hours, are all key to making work pay for universal credit recipients.

In this morning's employment figures, we saw that the employment of disabled people is up by 590,000 in the past three years. The disability employment rate has gone up by 4.9% in that time, and the gap has been narrowed by two percentage points. We were talking about this earlier, and it is welcome news, but there is much, much more to be done, as only half of people with disabilities are in work, compared with 80% of the non-disabled population.

**Stephen Timms:** I am glad that the Minister has raised the question of the disability employment gap. Former Ministers—two of them, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), are in their places this afternoon—promised that a quid pro quo for the cuts in employment and support allowance would be halving the disability employment gap by 2020. That was in his party's manifesto, and the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, committed to halving the gap by 2020. Why has that promise now shamefully been abandoned?

**Damian Hinds:** We are committed to working towards halving the disability employment gap. The right hon. Gentleman is reading somewhat more into things than he can or should. We are absolutely committed to doing that, but there is a long way to go, and he will know better than most how hard it will be. But the figures we have announced this morning show that the employment rate for people with disabilities is up by almost 5%. That is welcome news that I had hoped would receive a more positive response from the Opposition.

**Stephen Timms:** I am not reading any more into the promise that was made than what was set out very clearly. In the election campaign David Cameron made it clear that the commitment was to halve the disability employment gap by 2020. There was a press release in the name of former Minister for Disabled People, the hon. Member for North Swindon, saying that it would be by 2020. Why has that promise now been so shamefully abandoned?

**Damian Hinds:** We are working hard on this. When my colleague the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work sums up at the end of the debate, she will no doubt elaborate on that more. To be able to do everything we can as a Government, we need employers to do more as well, as the right hon. Gentleman will recognise. A whole-society approach is required to address this great challenge. Progress is being made but more is needed. He should have no doubt about the Government's commitment to doing everything possible to achieve that.

One reason why so much more needs to be done is that we still have that yawning gap despite all the progress that has been made—despite the regulatory reform, the medical advances, the advances in assistive

and adaptive technology, and, critically, the fact that we know that so many people with disabilities want to move into work and that so much talent is not currently being fully utilised. We know that being in work can have wider benefits for the individual, beyond the purely financial. There is clear evidence that work is linked to better physical and mental health, and to improved wellbeing. That is a key theme in our recently published Green Paper "Improving Lives", and a driver behind the changes to the employment and support allowance and universal credit that were announced in last summer's Budget.

ESA was originally introduced—I am happy to acknowledge the bipartisan parts of this debate—in 2008 by the then Labour Government. The expectation at that time was that the Atos-run assessment process would place the clear majority of claimants into the work-related activity group, leaving a relatively smaller number in the support group. Over time it became clear that that was not the case, with around three times as many people in the support group as in the work-related activity group. At the same time, fewer than 1% of people were leaving that benefit for work each month.

That is why we are introducing changes to encourage and support claimants to take steps back to work and to fulfil their full potential. From next April we will no longer include the work-related activity component for new ESA claims, or the equivalent element for people on universal credit with a health condition or disability. I stress that that is for new claims after April next year; there will be no cash losers among those already in receipt of ESA or its universal credit equivalent, and there will be further safeguards meaning that they will not lose the extra payments even if reassessed after April and placed in the work-related activity group.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I very much welcome the Green Paper, which many of us have been looking forward to for some time. It sets the direction of travel, providing a much more joined-up approach for this group of very vulnerable people. On the notional cash loss for new WRAG claimants, could there be support from the financial support grant in the Green Paper—

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): The flexible support fund.

**Mr Burrowes:** Yes, the flexible support fund, which could provide some flexibility and relief for those particular needy groups?

**Damian Hinds:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and to the former Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, to whom I pay tribute for bringing forward the universal credit system and so much else that goes with it. The flexible support fund is part of the package of support there is, through the Jobcentre Plus network and other means, to help people into work. It is the case—I will come on to this in a moment—that more money will go into those support packages to help people into work, or, as some people have very significant barriers and some distance to go, to get closer towards work. About 47% of people in the work-related activity group also receive the personal independence payment, which is, of course, exempt from the benefit freeze, and there will be

no change to the support group supplement. In the Green Paper consultation, we are consulting on whether we should decouple the support group rates from the type of support people can receive, so that those in the support group can seek help that goes towards their getting work without worrying about their benefit entitlement being at risk.

The amount we are spending on disability benefits, at £50 billion, is not going down: it is going up. In real terms, it will be higher at the end of this decade than it was at the beginning. We believe that the change in the work-related activity group, working in tandem with the new employment support package announced in the Green Paper, will help to provide the right incentives and support to assist new claimants who have limited capability for work. We believe that this package—representing £60 million of funding in 2017-18, rising to £100 million a year in 2020-21 and developed with external stakeholders, including groups and charities expert in addressing the barriers that can come with disability—can have a much bigger and lasting effect on people's prospects and their livelihoods than the work-related activity component itself. In addition to the funding package, we are introducing £15 million for the Jobcentre Plus flexible support fund in 2017-18 and 2018-19 to help claimants with limited capability for work. From next April, we are also removing the 52-week permitted work limit that exists in ESA, to allow claimants to continue to undertake up to 16 hours part-time paid work and, currently, earn up to £115.50 per week.

I trust that hon. Members will recognise the value in our approach. Today's employment figures show unemployment at 4.8%—a decade low. Average wages are rising at 2.4%, which in real terms is 1.7%. Since 2010, we have seen a 2.8 million rise in the number of people in a job, 865,000 fewer workless households and 62,000 fewer households where no one has ever worked. Income inequality has fallen and average incomes are the highest on record. There are 300,000 fewer people and 100,000 fewer children in relative low income. This morning's figures show that the rate of young people who have left full-time education and are not in work is at a new low, and the biggest drop in unemployment was among the long-term unemployed.

We introduced the national living wage—a £900 a year pay rise already for a full-time person on the previous minimum wage, with more to come. We have taken millions out of income tax. We have extended free childcare to disadvantaged two-year-olds and we are upping childcare spend by £1 billion a year. We are being ambitious on skills through school reforms and a dramatic increase in apprenticeships, so that more people can share in the opportunities of the new world economy. We are transforming social security through universal credit. We are stabilising the nation's finances, and ensuring that low-income families and those with health conditions and disabilities have the support they need to enter and progress in work as we build an economy and a society that works for everyone.

2.23 pm

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): The UK Government must commit to protecting disadvantaged people from the impact of future budget cuts in their autumn statement. Post-Brexit, it is essential, that with the risks to economy and with inflation rising and set to rise further, the Government act now.

Analysis by the IFS is the latest sign that the UK leaving the EU is having a negative impact on the UK economy even before article 50 is triggered. The IFS said that “virtually all” forecasters revised down their predications for growth and revised up their expectations for inflation in the years ahead. The collapse in the value of the pound, combined with potential rises in inflation, will hit the poorest and the most disadvantaged in society hardest. It will mean more of their income will have to be spent on day-to-day costs and living standards will push people into poverty.

**James Cartlidge:** If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about the disadvantaged, will he explain why it has been reported that the Scottish Government will defer, until April 2020, taking powers from the UK Government to administer the welfare system?

**Ian Blackford:** I expected this issue to be raised, given press speculation. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman the facts of the matter: with the powers coming to us, we will control 15% of welfare spending in Scotland. We have to put in place the mechanisms for us to deliver fairness with the revenues we have at our disposal. We certainly would not punish the poorest in our society in the way that this Government have, and we certainly would not be punishing the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign women, who are not getting their just rights when they have had only a year's notice. What I would be saying to this Government is, “Give us the powers over welfare so that we can protect the people in Scotland.” When we have put in place the mechanisms to allow us to look after people, we will certainly be doing a better job than the Government are doing today.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the point about powers is that, unlike this Tory Government, we are able to help and support people properly? We should not have to fill the black hole they have created in our budget. When we get those powers and have that agency, they will be set up properly. We will protect the people in Scotland properly.

**Ian Blackford:** My hon. Friend makes a very valuable point, because this is about powers and responsibilities. For us to protect people in Scotland in the way that we want to, we have to have powers. We were promised—since this has been raised—devo to the max. We were promised home rule for Scotland. How on earth can we have home rule for Scotland when we control 30% of our revenues and 15% of social security? I am afraid that the UK Government's failure to protect the disabled and the pensioners demonstrates that if we want to do what is necessary in Scotland, we will ultimately have to have the independent powers to do so. I am sure we will get to that point.

Let me return to what I want to address. *[Interruption.]* I am only responding to the Conservatives' uninformed distractions, with which we are all too familiar. The IFS stated:

“Normally, working-age benefit recipients would also be at least partly protected as benefits usually rise in line with prices, but, as we have discussed before, their benefits have been largely frozen in cash terms, meaning that their income from this source

[*Ian Blackford*]

is fully exposed to future inflation. Those in work will, unless they are able to negotiate a bigger pay rise, find that their earnings will stretch less far than they otherwise would have done.”

Why should the most disadvantaged pay the price for Brexit and its consequences? That is what the Conservative Back Benchers should be addressing today rather than making an undisguised attack on the Scottish Government. What we need to address this afternoon is why working people will suffer from rising inflation. The weakest in our society deserve to be protected and their benefits ought to be inflation-proofed. Why are the UK Government not doing that? Why are they not seeking to protect the vulnerable in our society?

**Hannah Bardell:** Does my hon. Friend agree that while the tax gap in the UK sits at £36 billion, this Government should be focusing on closing that gap, and not marginalising and targeting some of the most vulnerable people in our society?

**Ian Blackford:** I fundamentally agree. There is a £36 billion tax gap, so let us fix that hole. I listened to the Minister talk earlier about the challenges the Government face in fixing the deficit. What they fail to recognise is the interaction between fiscal and monetary policy. It is the richest who have benefited most from quantitative easing. We should have had a fiscal stimulus package. That would have driven investment and productivity into the economy, and got more people back into work. That is what we should be doing.

**Jeremy Quin:** This is not the first time I have heard the hon. Gentleman refer to the great fiscal reflation he is planning. I welcome the fact that in the same speech he is also talking about the problems with inflation, but is that not a contradiction in terms?

**Ian Blackford:** It most certainly is not. The reason for the rise in inflation—to something between 2% and 3% next year, according to commentators—is, quite simply, that the pound has crashed, and the reason the pound has crashed is that investors do not have confidence in the UK economy, and who caused that? It is a direct consequence of Brexit, through the referendum, which was the misjudgment of the previous Prime Minister.

**James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con):** Does the hon. Gentleman not see an inconsistency in his argument, given that only a few years ago, his party was campaigning to leave the United Kingdom and, by virtue of doing so, the EU?

**Ian Blackford:** The hon. Gentleman has made a gross misjudgment. When we were campaigning for independence for Scotland, it was about securing Scotland’s future as a European nation. Those in the Better Together campaign continually told the people of Scotland that our European future would be secured only by staying with the UK. Well how has that worked out? I am glad that the Scottish Parliament has given a mandate to the Government of Scotland to make sure we protect Scotland’s position as a European nation and remain within the single market, and, through that, to ensure we protect the prosperity and jobs of the people of our country.

Let me come back, if I may, to the subject we are supposed to be discussing.

**Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab):** While half of me is loth to continue this debate, I want us to be clear. We have here an economic crisis brought about by political instability caused by the rupturing of unions between countries. So for the hon. Gentleman to argue that Scottish independence would not have had similar disastrous effects for the Scottish economy is, frankly, disingenuous.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I remind Members to be cautious with the language they use. Also, I do not want this to degenerate into a debate about independence, and I know that the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (*Ian Blackford*) wants to get back to his brief and not to be tempted by those who want to go out fishing today. To those Members intervening, I say this: when your speaking time is reduced to four minutes, do not blame me.

**Ian Blackford:** I will take your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. I only say to the hon. Member for Wirral South (*Alison McGovern*) that she has demonstrated once again that Better Together is still alive and well—and how did that work out for the Labour party in Scotland?

I will return to the issue we are dealing with. We have inflation created by Brexit and a falling the pound, and the result of this failure will be a fall in living standards for many of our poorest—falling living standards brought to you by this Government. On top of the benefit cuts next year, the Prime Minister is sleepwalking into a perfect storm for low-income families, rather than living up to her promise of delivering for just-managing families. The UK Government must use the autumn statement to end their austerity obsession and instead bring forward an inclusive programme that will truly support low-income families and their children.

The UK Government’s U-turn on tax credits last year was simply a delaying tactic that kicked cuts to universal credit further down the line. The Government should take the opportunity to reverse the cuts to universal credit work allowance in their autumn statement. The original intention of universal credit was to increase work incentives and make sure that, as the Government put it, work paid. On top of damning economic forecasts, however, which will push up the cost of living, the work allowance cut will simply push more working people into poverty. It has slashed the income of working universal credit claimants. The IFS has calculated that in the long term more than 3 million working families will lose an average of more than £1,000 a year as a result of the work allowance cut.

**Hannah Bardell:** Shameful.

**Ian Blackford:** As my hon. Friend says, it is shameful. The Child Poverty Action Group estimates that the resulting cut in income will mean that many low-income parents cannot protect the income levels they had before April 2016.

House of Commons Library analysis from February 2016 calculates that lone parents without housing costs will experience the largest reduction in their work allowance, from £8,800 in 2015-16 to £4,764 in 2016-17—a loss of

over £4,000. Is that what the Government want to defend? A person or couple without housing costs who claim universal credit where one or both are disabled will see their allowance reduced from £7,764 in 2015-16 to £4,764—a loss of £3,000. The U-turn on tax credits in the short term saved families and working people from having their benefit cut, but in the long term the work allowance cut will have a similar impact.

The House of Commons Library analysis also states that the work allowance reductions announced in the Summer Budget

“will ultimately have a similar impact to the changes to tax credits which are not now going ahead, though the impact of changes to UC work allowances will not be fully felt until the roll out of Universal Credit is complete.”

By cutting the work allowance, the Government will impose an eye-watering level of marginal taxation on people in low-paid jobs and make it harder than ever for those in low-income households to break out of the poverty trap.

That point is well understood by many, including the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), the previous Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, who said:

“At present, the 2016 Budget’s plan to reduce Universal Credit work allowances will not be the most effective way of controlling welfare expenditure and, moreover, it goes against the key principles. The planned reduction will affect more than three million people, reducing their income by an average of over £1,000 per year. This will reduce people’s incentive to move into work. Moreover, in November 2015 the previous Chancellor decided to reverse the reduction in working tax credits, increasing the pressure on Universal Credit as it created an artificial disincentive to move to Universal Credit from Tax Credits.”

I do not say this too often, but I fully agree with him. I would even say that, for the Government, the game is up, when even the architect of much of the landscape on this issue can see the fatal flaws in what they are doing. When will they start to listen and begin to act?

We are having this debate today, and welcome though it is, it is important that we achieve a cross-party consensus on the substantive motion we are debating tomorrow, on the cuts to employment and support allowance. The House will have an opportunity to send a very clear signal to the Chancellor ahead of the autumn statement next week. It is a scandal that proposed cuts to ESA WRAG are still going ahead. The Chancellor must halt these planned cuts until the UK Government can deliver the long-awaited support promised for disabled people in and out of work. Almost 500,000 disabled people in the UK rely on ESA WRAG. This £30 cut will make the cost of living more expensive for many people—even more so in the context of the devalued pound and a potential inflation increase.

The UK Government said that these changes were introduced to

“remove the financial incentives that could otherwise discourage claimants from taking steps back to work”.

But Mencap’s review of this policy found

“no relevant evidence setting out a convincing case that the ESA WRAG payment acts as a financial disincentive to claimants work, or that reducing the payment would incentivise people to seek work”.

It is a positive step that the new Secretary of State has announced the Green Paper on support for disabled people in and out of work, and we look forward to

assessing the detail of the Department’s proposals in due course. However, until the detail in the Green Paper comes to fruition, storming ahead with these cuts is simply putting the cart before the horse. The autumn statement is a key opportunity for the new Cabinet to prove it is true to its rhetoric about delivering for just-managing families. That can be achieved only by abandoning austerity by reversing these cuts and delivering an inclusive Budget fit for the post-referendum economic turmoil.

A failure to act will drive more people into poverty and the use of food banks. Recent data show that the Tories’ austerity agenda continues to push people into poverty across the UK. A survey for the End Child Poverty coalition suggested that 3.5 million children were living in poverty in the UK, with 220,000 of them in Scotland. A separate study by the Trussell Trust found that in the first half of this year there was an increase in food bank usage that included 500,000 three-day emergency food supplies distributed across the UK, of which 188,500 were for children.

A recent Resolution Foundation report has highlighted the need for the urgent delivery of support for families who are just managing. It also noted:

“Average incomes in the low to middle income group were no higher in 2014-15 than in 2004-05, reflecting not just the turmoil of the post-crisis period but also a sharp pre-crisis slowdown in income growth.”

It also points out that the projections for unemployment have been revised up since the March Budget following the referendum in June, and real pay growth is now projected to be lower than previously thought.

In conclusion, with this autumn statement, the Chancellor has the ability to re-prioritise the spending agenda to reflect the very real danger of economic turmoil resulting from the June referendum and ongoing negotiations with the EU. The Chancellor must use the autumn statement to propose measures that reverse benefit cuts and mitigate the impact of economic uncertainty on disadvantaged people.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, let me clarify that we shall start with a seven-minute limit, but if Members can speak in less time than that, everyone should be able to have approximately equal time.

2.40 pm

**Mr Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I shall be as brief as possible and certainly intend to be well under that limit. I shall not follow the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) down a memory-lane trip involving independence or leaving the single market. I will say, however, that I am a huge admirer of him. Many of my ancestors are buried in his constituency, so I like to claim a little bit of union with him, even though he would not want to admit it. I shall visit the area as often as possible to ensure that I give the hon. Gentleman the best support I can for him to stay up there as long as possible.

I rise for the first time in, I think, nearly seven years to speak from the Back Benches, and I do so to speak on an issue that is very close to my heart. I want to

[Mr Iain Duncan Smith]

explain why that is the case to my colleagues. Let me start by welcoming both Ministers to their new roles on the Front Bench, and I congratulate them on continuing to commit to the changes and reforms necessary to improve the quality of life for so many people who would otherwise be left behind.

In passing, let me note one or two figures. The number of children in workless households has fallen to record levels—down to just under 11% from the 20% that we inherited. A child in a workless household is nearly three quarters more likely to be in poverty than a child in an in-work household. That is an important point, because that dynamic is critical—a point to which I shall return. The fall in income inequality has been mentioned, and it is falling because more people at the lower end are going back into work.

There is another important issue about disability. We have committed to, want to commit to and must stay with the position of wanting to see more people with disabilities in work. We want the gap to be at least halved, which I think is feasible. I shall explain in a few moments why I think that it is feasible.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Duncan Smith:** In a minute, but let me finish this point first.

A lot of the work of the Green Paper was done when I was in the Department. It was a White Paper at that stage, and I hope it gets speeded up and becomes a White Paper again fairly soon. After five reviews of the inherited employment and support allowance, I would be the first to acknowledge that although we have stabilised it and it is better than it was, it is a very difficult area, as we all know. If every Member was prepared to be reasonable, we would all recognise that these things need to change.

Let me clarify that the main single thing that I wanted to see change and I still want to see changed is this artificial idea that people are either too sick to work or able to work. There should be a greater nuancing in people's lives, and universal credit now opens the door to a much more flexible process that allows even those diagnosed and reasonably said to be "not capable of work" to be able to work—and if they wish to work, they should be allowed to do so as far as they possibly can, with the taper used to take benefit money away gradually. I think that might improve the quality of life for many people. I know that this is a submission in the Green Paper, and I hope the Minister will bear it in mind.

Let me return to the point that when universal credit was set up by my noble Friend Lord Freud, who worked very hard on it, and me, the idea was that it was not just about money, but about human interface. The people in jobcentres now stay with individuals as they go into work to help advise them and be with them. This will be a more human interface, so that people can be helped through to gain extra hours, which opens the door for people with limited capabilities to work to be helped in a way that would not have been possible if we had stayed with the original system. All this is very good and very positive.

There are two critical elements. First, when people step into work, the barrier must be reduced by improving the amount of money that can be held from benefit before it is tapered away. The second element is the taper itself, which is the simple process by which people have their income reduced. I say to the Minister that those two elements, notwithstanding all the other stuff such as improved childcare and everything else, are at the heart of what delivers.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies and others recently looked at what the dynamic effect of universal credit might be as it rolls out. The IFS was very clear: it said that the effect was a 13% improvement in all elements—going back to work, staying in work, taking more hours and earning more money. I know from my experience in the Department that every time one benefit has been substituted for another, it has almost always been worse on arrival than the previous benefit before people engage with it and improve it. This is the first time that a benefit being rolled out is a net improvement on a previous benefit.

I therefore make this recommendation. That figure of a 13% improvement was made on the basis of the original work allowances. In the spirit of general collective view and belief, I say that if we really want to see the right thing happen to people out there who try to get into work and stay in work, the allowances are critical. I recommend and hope that my colleagues in government will think very carefully again about the decision to reduce those allowances. I recognise the problem with the deficit, and we of course want to reduce it. I am not asking for more money; I am asking for wiser spending. I wonder whether we could revisit the idea of a tax threshold allowance and look to see whether getting the money to the lower five deciles would be better served by universal credit. Some 70% of those people will be on universal credit, whereas only 25p of a tax threshold allowance will actually go to the bottom five deciles.

I urge the Minister to speak to his right hon. Friends and say, "Look, we have a very good opportunity to do something that is really bold and right for those whose lives we really want to improve—those that the Prime Minister rightly said was her target group." It is a very Conservative thing to do to help people who are doing the right thing to improve their lives. Even if the Government cannot do it all, they should look at two elements: lone parents and those with limited capability for work. This would answer the problems surrounding the WRAG, too. I urge Ministers to do just that. It is the right thing to do, and it will be the thing to do that changes lives and improves the quality of those lives.

2.47 pm

**Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab):** I begin by saying some words that I never thought would leave my mouth: I really hope that Ministers listen to what the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) has just said—but where were you as Secretary of State? The right hon. Gentleman has explained very clearly how many people feel about the proposed changes. I hope that it is not too late for the Government to change their mind.

This Government seem to be developing a problem with transparency. We found out from the front page of *The Times* this week that there is no plan for Brexit,

even though we were told that there was. My constituents found out through a leak from another local authority that their A&E department was under threat. Now we find that the Government do not intend to publish a full distributional analysis of the impact of the decisions they are about to make in the autumn statement. The decision not to publish a full analysis of that impact makes Opposition Members incredibly suspicious. The people who are going to feel the worst brunt of those decisions might well feel extremely angry.

**Robert Ffello:** The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) said that, historically, whenever there was a change to benefits, people suffered until the situation was changed and improved. Does that not also explain why so many of our constituents are extremely worried about what is going to happen?

**Jenny Chapman:** That is right. People want clarity. What everyone wants is for work to pay and for people to be better off in work than out of work, but that is not what we are going to get.

The Government used to be very keen on having a full and detailed distributional analysis, and I have with me the introduction to the one they published in 2012. They said then:

“The Government has taken unprecedented steps to increase transparency and enable effective scrutiny of policy making by publishing detailed distributional analysis of the impact of its reforms on households.”

It was a very good thing that the Government, and the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), did then. The right hon. Gentleman went on to say:

“The analysis shows average impacts due to policy changes over time across the income and expenditure distributions by decile”.

I hope that, at the end of the debate, Ministers will commit themselves to publishing the information by decile, so that we can scrutinise it properly and challenge the Government on what they are about to reveal. That is not just my view. The Tory Chair of the Treasury Committee agrees, because he knows that if he is to do his job effectively the information must be published and available to everyone, including the public. This matters: the distributional analysis should reveal the impact of tax, welfare and public spending changes on 10 household income brackets, but the Government want to halve the amount of detail and cover just five brackets.

I was pleased when the Conservatives chose this new Prime Minister, given the choices that they had, and I was pleased when she said that she wanted this to be “a country that works for everyone”.

Don't we all? But how can we know whether the Prime Minister is true to her word if she does not proceed to publish the information that we need to test the assertion by which she herself asked to be judged? Unless she does so, we cannot test that claim.

This leads us to ask ourselves what the Government are attempting to hide. What the Minister said sounded incredibly positive, and there were many measures that he said we ought to be welcoming. If that is true—if he is right and Opposition Front Benchers are wrong—he should publish the information, so that we can test him on his claims. Go on, let us see it!

I suspect that the picture is not quite as rosy as the Minister suggested. Perhaps it is the £1,500 a year to be taken from disabled people that he is trying to conceal, but it could be any number of the measures that he has in mind. The Resolution Foundation has estimated that the poorest 50% of households will be £375 worse off on average by 2020-21, while the other half will be £235 better off. We need this information to be published before every Budget and every autumn statement, so that we can compare the impact of the different measures. I want to be able to see what is going to happen next week and compare it with what happened three years ago.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a marvellous speech. Does she agree that we can safely conclude that someone is going to lose out somewhere when the Government speak about their proposals in such glowing terms?

**Jenny Chapman:** My hon. Friend has far more experience of scrutinising Conservative Governments than I have, and I suspect that he may be right.

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the effect of all the tax and benefit changes in last year's autumn statement would mean losses about 25 times larger for those in the bottom decile than for those in the top decile. If the IFS is wrong, let the Government publish the information, so that the Minister can back up the claim that he has made today. The IFS also says that average earnings have been revised down in every year of the forecast, as has real household disposable income.

We want to know exactly what the country is in for. On 23 June, we made a decision to leave the European Union, and what that has done—or part of what it has done—is to unleash a huge amount of uncertainty on the country, on business and on decision-makers. One thing that the Government could do to ease some of that uncertainty is to publish all the information that we need to determine where we are and track the direction in which the Government are taking us.

According to the IFS, nearly half a million children will be plunged into absolute poverty by 2020

“as a result of planned tax and benefit reforms”

in the March Budget. The IFS says that an additional 500,000 people—including 400,000 children—will be in relative poverty because of tax and benefit overhauls. That paints a very different picture from the one presented by the Minister. Unless he is prepared to publish a proper distributional analysis, we shall be forced to conclude that he is, for some reason, trying—his attempt will fail—to conceal the impact of some of the measures that he has in mind. I hope that he will resist that urge and commit himself to publishing a proper analysis with 10 deciles, so that we can see what is happening, make comparisons over time and challenge and scrutinise the Government effectively.

2.56 pm

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate. The shadow Chancellor talked about econometrics; I want, like the Prime Minister, to focus on human metrics. At the outset of her premiership, she rightly said that this would be a Government who wanted to

[Mr David Burrowes]

“stand up for the weak”

and reach out to the “just managing”.

Today’s debate, like the debate that we shall have tomorrow, is about seeking to fulfil those aims.

I intend to concentrate on cuts in the universal credit work allowance today and delay most of my comments about the ESA WRAG payments until tomorrow, although I will say now that I approve of the Green Paper’s direction of travel. Its vision of integrated and personalised employment and health support is overdue, but welcome. However, we need to look out for the disabled people—some 500,000, according to a House of Commons Library estimate—who worked in April as new WRAG claimants. They will still be affected. The flexible support fund—about which I look forward to hearing from my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work—is crucial. Along with other discretionary relief, it needs to meet the wider costs of job seeking for disabled people by April. We cannot deny that those wider costs exist, and we must ensure that we meet them. My support for the Government’s admirable reform agenda for disability depends on that.

Let me now say something about low-income families, who are the main subject of the debate and, in particular, about the first few lines of the Government amendment, which

“notes the role of universal credit in ensuring that work pays”.

That is what we want to happen. It is the very basis of our welfare reforms. We must commend the Government, and previous Governments, for the fact that some 764,000 children will not wake up in workless households today because of the opportunities for work that have been provided. That is extraordinarily important. Work is obviously a primary route out of poverty, and the income tax cuts, the national living wage and the 30 hours of free childcare are all extremely welcome.

What will drive all this through, however, is universal credit that does what it was designed to do, and makes work pay. In Enfield, which rolled the scheme out early, it has been a success. Work coaches have reached out to previously unreached individuals, helping them to find work. More people are working, obtaining work more quickly, staying in work longer, and earning more. The first nine months have been very successful. Universal credit claimants are now 13% more likely than jobseeker’s allowance claimants to be employed, work 12 days more, and are more than twice as likely to try to work for more hours.

That is all extremely welcome. However, there is a risk that the cuts in the universal credit work allowances will unpick the good work of the universal credit: the work coaches, the incentives, the living wage and the free childcare. It will be like a traveller in an airport. We want the traveller to help people—especially those on low incomes—to travel into work. It will now be switched in another direction; actually, it will be going in the opposite direction, which will mean 2.7 million working families will on average be £1,500 worse off without the benefit of work allowances. It matters greatly to these families. It also does not make sense that these families who are claiming universal credit will be worse off than families protected under the legacy tax credits payments living in the same town, the same neighbourhood or even the same street. That is not fair.

There is cross-party concern about this, and a shared concern among campaign groups, which are not always on the same wavelength. Gingerbread, focusing its concerns on single parents as well as couples with children, makes the point that working single parents in the poorest fifth of households are set to lose nearly 7% of their income. A home-owning single parent working full time will be over £3,000 a year worse off without the work allowances, and if a second earner enters work he or she will lose 65p in every pound earned. CARE also made this point in relation to recognising our support for marriage in the tax system, which it says could be undermined. In particular, single-earner married couples on median incomes with two children will lose significantly without the work allowances.

**Mr Duncan Smith:** My hon. Friend is rightly dealing with the levels and the amounts, but may I take him back to one point that came out of the dynamic study, which was that if we stayed with the purposes of the original universal credit with that allowance, it would amount to a minimum of an extra 300,000 people in work over and above existing forecasts? That is a positive reason for staying with those allowances.

**Mr Burrowes:** I agree, and it helps to revolutionise things for everyone—those on low incomes and those on median incomes. A one-earner married couple on a median income with two children—those with children are particularly impacted, given the costs—will lose some £2,211.04 per year without the allowances.

This Opposition debate is plainly timely as it comes ahead of the autumn statement. Before all the universal credit is rolled out and has its full impact, we want to make sure that that impact fulfils the first line of the amendment: to ensure that work pays. Welfare reform rises and falls on this basis, and that is why I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) for all the work he has done. That is the basis of our welfare reform. We want this to rise to meet the aspirations of everyone who can work—families who have been put in poverty, and vulnerable disabled people who are the subject of this debate.

I urge Ministers to take back to the Chancellor the message coming from both sides of the House and from campaign groups, who are united in their concerns for these low-income families, and to ensure that universal credit, which is doing great work across our country, is given the boost it deserves and that work allowances are regenerating it to ensure that work pays.

3.2 pm

**Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): One of the beneficial consequences of the recent change in Government personnel is that we are no longer subjected on a daily basis to the phrase “long-term economic plan.” We know of course from recent press reports that that is because the Government do not really have an economic plan at present, and many of the pre-existing problems in our economy are now exacerbated considerably by the decision to leave the EU. We also know, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said, that it is going to get a lot worse before it gets better. The Institute for Fiscal Studies reports that pretty much every forecaster says things are

going to get extremely challenging. Six months ago we could have got \$1.5 dollars for £1; today, we would be lucky to get \$1.25. As those changes feed through, we are going to see a rise in prices and in inflation.

Yet at the same time we have had practically no real-terms growth in wages over the last 10 years, and that is likely to continue. Although there has been a blip in 2016 as a result of the increase in the national minimum wage, it is likely to be just that; we are not likely to see sustained growth in wages, so revenues are not going to increase as a result of increasing wages. This will present the Government with an even more challenging problem; they will be facing rising costs, and revenues not keeping pace with them, and they are going to have to take some difficult decisions.

**James Cartlidge:** The point about the currency has been made several times now. I campaigned for remain, but in terms of the cost of living, which is obviously key to this debate about poverty and living standards, the hon. Gentleman must surely recognise that our country's economy is unbalanced and there is significant benefit from a lower pound. We need to export more if we are to have sustainable growth.

**Tommy Sheppard:** The Government are faced with a big challenge, and I think how they manage the necessary deficit in the years ahead will be the measure of this Government. The Prime Minister has talked about just-managing families; we will have to see whether or not we have a Government who, as they have to make the necessary cuts and adjustments to their plans, are prepared to protect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged. It is said that the mark of a civilised society is how it treats the worst-off and the most vulnerable; we will see in next week's autumn statement whether the Government really believe that.

The Government have a bit of form on this question. Just last week there was a report from a United Nations committee which put the Government in the dock for the way in which their policies affect disabled people in our society. It is not the first such report; there have been many others, yet the reaction from the Government was to dismiss this out of hand in a fairly cavalier manner and say that the criticisms were unfounded. Well, these reports cannot all be wrong, and we need a better approach from the Government to these reports if disabled people in our community are going to feel with any confidence that their concerns are taken seriously.

I do not have a lot of time, but I want to spend a couple of minutes talking about the cuts to employment and support allowance. Perhaps over 500,000 people will be affected by them, including over 60,000 in Scotland and over 1,300 in my constituency. It has been said that the cut of £30 a week in this benefit, bringing it into line with jobseeker's allowance, is being introduced to make sure that there are no incentives to be on the higher rate. Not a single one of us in this Chamber could live on £109 a week, but let us take the Government argument at face value. It is not an incentive, and the argument that it fails to recognise the very real costs that people in this category have as a result of their illness or disability.

Over 1,300 of my constituents will be affected by this, as I have said, and I want to read into the record the testimony of two of them. The first is Dean Reilly, a

single father of three children. Four years ago he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and he had to leave his job at British Gas. Dean is currently in the work-related activity group of ESA and gets the £30 a week. He tells me in his correspondence that this money means he has more security, independence and confidence. It helps to mitigate some of the extra costs he incurs because of his health condition, and it helps to compensate for the fact that his condition prevents him from being able to function normally. One of the symptoms of his condition is that he often suffers from fatigue which can develop without warning. If this happens when he is out of the house, he has either to rely on friends or to pick up or a taxi, which can be very expensive.

Dean also uses oxygen therapy to help to alleviate the symptoms of his condition and he attends the MS therapy centre in Leith twice a week and makes the suggested donation of £13 on each visit. That is what he spends his £30 a week on, and he believes that were he not to get it, his quality of life would be significantly affected. In fact, it could be even worse. Dean works a few hours a week, as he is allowed to, at the local Nike shop. He feels that if he was not getting this extra money and support, he would not be able to continue that employment, so would face a double-whammy in terms of loss of income.

The second person I want to mention is Lauren Stonebanks. She wrote a long letter to me, but I will only read out a couple of the points it makes. She says the money

“helps with increased bills because I find it so hard to leave the house. Most people spend a chunk of time at work or school or university but I'm often stuck in my own house using my own gas and electricity. It also gets used on a takeaway or very, very convenient food if I am too exhausted from fighting my illness to cook. Other times it might cover a taxi if I need to get home as quickly as possible because I've become too unwell to be outside the house.”

She also says:

“In my personal experience, losing this money won't incentivise me to return to work. It will demoralise me and make me feel like I'm completely worthless. £30 a week is nothing to MPs but everything to someone as ill as me...I already struggle with finances because of my condition. Financial insecurity and welfare reform wreak havoc on my mental wellbeing.”

The Minister will probably say that existing claimants like Lauren will not be affected by this change, but most of the people receiving this benefit are not doing so on a permanent basis. The whole purpose of it is to get them back into employment so that they can stand on their own two feet. If this change goes through, many people will take employment, and if it does not work out for them because of their condition they will have to go back on ESA, at which point they will lose money.

For anyone who has a mental health condition or who suffers from stress and anxiety, making it difficult for them to go to work, what sort of additional pressure will be put upon them when they have to ask themselves, “If I take this job and it doesn't work out, I could lose a third of my income and be much worse off?” That is a horrible position in which to put people, and I appeal to Members on both sides of the House to come together and support the motions today and tomorrow, and to ask the Government to reconsider, to postpone the changes, to stop digging and to have a think and change their mind.

3.11 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I applaud the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for his great passion. He speaks very eloquently. I could not resist intervening on him about the currency because I think that the key economic challenge for the country involves rebalancing. Every aspect of what we are debating today is affected by the sustainability of our growth.

I want to focus on two key points. The first is why I support the move to a universal credit system in principle, based on my experience of running a small business. The second is that, when we talk about distributional analysis, we have to have an analysis of the intergenerational impacts of any changes. We have to start talking about all benefits in the system, not just those that are paid out to those of working age.

Last year, we had a number of debates about tax credits at the time when the changes were meant to be coming through. I spoke about this several times, and I said then—I say it again now—that tax credits were one of the greatest mistakes in the history of the welfare state, bringing in a £30 billion means-tested in-work benefit for healthy working people to make them completely dependent and to nationalise the income of the country for political purposes. I say that not out of ideology but out of experience.

My experience of running a small business taught me about the problems of the people who are trapped on the rough edges of the welfare state. I had a member of staff who told me that she did not want a pay rise because she would lose too much in tax credits. More commonly, people working 16 or 24 hours a week told me that they did not want to work any more hours. I heard that many times, and other business owners have told me exactly the same thing. People should be encouraged to make the most of the talents they were born with, and we should not have a system that stymies that aim or disincentivises people from making the most of their talents.

What I particularly welcome about universal credit is the fact that it smooths out the rough edges by being more generous in terms of childcare and support. I am sure we all agree that we want people who are unemployed to move off benefits and into work, but we never talk about people who are on in-work benefits needing to work harder to get off those benefits. To me, however, it should be the goal of our economic system to reduce dependency and help people to maximise their income from real employment. The other part of the system that I welcome is the extra support that it will give, not just to get people into work but to get people who work part time to work more hours. That is very much to be commended.

It is quite extraordinary that, for the first time ever, pensioners are now better off than the working-age population, once housing costs have been taken into account. This is something that we need to talk about, because 68% of benefits are paid out to pensioners. The point about housing costs is incredibly important.

**Ian Blackford**: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that a pension is not a benefit? People who have paid national insurance have an entitlement to a state pension, which they have paid for.

**James Cartlidge**: That is a very fair point. Our voters say, “Well, I’ve paid in so I should get it”, but that is not the case for the winter fuel allowance—as the hon. Gentleman knows, millionaires get that along with everybody else—the free TV licence or the Christmas bonus. Although the state pension is based on paying in, it is a pay-as-you-go system. The fact is that the current young working generation are paying in but they might not receive the triple lock. Also, we know for certain that many of them will still be paying their housing costs when they retire. We know that 94% of home-owning pensioners own their property outright. They have no housing costs. The young working generation are probably paying for the defined benefit pensions of those who are fortunate to receive them, and for the state pension of those who have the triple lock. They are also paying for those who possibly do not even have housing costs, yet they themselves will have housing costs perhaps well into their retirement. We are reaching a critical point here.

**Ian Blackford**: I am conscious that we should not be diverted from the topic, but the key point here is that the national insurance fund is currently running at a surplus that, according to the Government’s own figures, is due to increase. It is not the case that pensioners are taking their income from others. They have paid their national insurance contributions, which fund the amount that is paid out to pensioners.

**James Cartlidge**: It is a pay-as-you-go system, but the key to this is the triple lock. The hon. Gentleman is welcome to read the report on intergenerational payments produced by our Select Committee. It has my name on it, although I have to say that I approved it having been on the Committee for only 15 minutes. I did not contribute to it, but I welcome all of it. It makes the point that we have a pay-as-you-go system and that the younger people currently paying in might not benefit from the present generosity, particularly in relation to the triple lock, which is unaffordable and unsustainable.

This is primarily a political question. During the leadership hustings, I asked the final two contestants the same question. I said, “Given the situation of many young people, is it morally defensible to continue to protect pensioner benefits?” The answer that both contestants gave me—quite rightly, given that we are a democracy and that we have elections—was that our manifesto had pledged to protect those benefits. However, as the shadow Chancellor has said—I am certainly not trying to pray him in aid—we also pledged to wipe out the deficit. That pledge is now coming home to roost. We are protecting so many budgets and forcing so many disproportionate cuts on others because of this huge cost which we will not touch, and I think we have to talk about it. This has to be done in a cross-party way. We all know the political reality of this situation. I am not naive, and I know the political price that can be paid if these things are not done correctly, but from canvassing in my constituency, I know that the older voters understand this point. They are as concerned about it as anybody else. We have to start talking about how the whole benefits system—not just the one for working-age people—can be reformed.

I very much welcome the speech made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), and I welcome what has

happened with universal credit. It will smooth out some of the perverse incentives created by the tax credit system, and it will encourage people to make the most of their talents and reduce their benefit dependency. Just as we had radical reform on in-work benefits, we must now start to think about what will happen to those who are retired and who will live longer and longer, so that we can all live in a happy, one nation situation in which all the generations get a fair deal.

3.18 pm

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I am pleased to take part in this debate, and to follow the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). He made the very fair point that benefits that go to pensioners in the higher tax brackets could be an area that is targeted for reductions. If we made those reductions, we would not be putting people with long-term chronic health conditions and disabilities into the position that the Government are choosing to put them in by making these ESA cuts.

I want to take part in this debate because in my constituency 6,138 people are either on universal credit—or on jobseeker's allowance and will be moved on to universal credit—or on ESA. That is a lot of people and the cuts will have a significant impact on some of them. When we look at the wider economic impact, we must also take account of the fact that more than £1 million will be taken out of the local economy—another £1 million that will not be spent in the local high street and that does not help the local economy. The measure does not make sense for individuals—it is unkind and cruel—and does not make sense for the local economy either.

I want in particular to focus on what the Chancellor publishes regarding the distributional implications of his measures. I note that the Government's amendment refers to the Chancellor's remarks to the Treasury Committee last month. He simply said that

"I will look carefully at the best format for doing so, including the issues you have raised around the baseline."

That is pretty gnomic. As well as being able to stop the ESA cuts, I hope that we may also persuade the Chancellor to revert to the practice that we saw between 2010 and 2015 of providing proper distributional analysis, showing how each decile will be affected in the first year and for the rest of the Parliament by changes in the tax and benefits system. That is the detail we want. That is the detail we used to have.

It is incredible that the Government have not published the detail. I do not believe that they do not know what the distributional impacts are. It is possible that they do not care, but they are foolish if they think that they can hide the impacts. Every year, three days after the Budget, the IFS does the analysis anyway, so the impacts are revealed to the nation in the newspapers. It would be much better for the Chancellor to do what was done between 2010 and 2015 and be up front about the impacts and put them in the back of the Red Book.

The Treasury Committee has been on this case for a long time and initially asked the previous Chancellor to make the changes. However, we have returned to pressing the new Chancellor. The Committee's Chairman, the right hon. Member for Chichester (Mr Tyrie), first pointed out that the quintile analysis

"cannot be used to determine the effect of government policies on household incomes."

Secondly, he said that it is

"not possible to determine the impact of the policies of the present Government on the distribution of tax and spending."

Thirdly, he stated that the "assumptions underpinning the analysis" keep changing, meaning that we cannot compare one Budget with another. Fourthly, he said that the attempt to apportion

"public spending on items such as health, police, justice, defence" by quintile is extremely flaky. We do not really know how much of these other public services are consumed by people in the different quintiles. If the Government want to do the quintile analysis, that is fine and they can publish it, but they should also do the decile analysis.

I want to remind the House about the impact of the last Budget. The truth is that it provided losses in annual net income for all families except two-earner couples without children. The bottom half of the income distribution gained £20. The top half, however, gained £170. Looking in detail at the deciles, the second poorest decile lose £1,500 between 2015 and 2019, but those next to the top gain £170. Looking at working-age families with children, the second poorest decile is set to lose £2,800, but those next to the top will gain £500. The number of children in absolute poverty between 2009-10 and 2013-14 rose by half a million. The proportion of children in absolute low income rose in that period from 11% to 17%. Ministers must not be seduced by their own rhetoric. We need to come back to a fact-based approach to policy making.

The new Chancellor has an opportunity to break free from the tight framework set by his predecessor. He can fulfil the promise made by the Prime Minister to help those who are just managing. If he publishes the information and makes some sensible change, we will all know that he has done that.

3.25 pm

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. Given the upcoming autumn statement and the incredibly important Green Paper, it represents a welcome opportunity for us to shape some of the decisions that will be taken. It is disappointing, however, that only two speakers so far—my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge)—have actually made suggestions about where funding could come from should any changes be made.

I want to look first at the context of the debate. This Government have introduced the national living wage, benefiting 2.75 million of this country's lowest earners, and we have committed to reach at least £9 an hour by 2020—a whole pound higher than what was in the Labour party manifesto at the election. The increase in the personal tax allowance, taking it from £6,495 to £11,000 with a commitment to reach £12,500 and then index-link it going forward, has lifted the lowest 3.2 million earners out of income tax altogether. Despite the doom and gloom of some speeches, we are delivering the strongest economic growth of any developed country, leading to record employment—461,000 more people are in work today than at this time last year. With my old Minister for disabled people's hat on, I welcome the news that a further 590,000 disabled people are in work compared with three years ago—a 4% increase. There is still much more to be done, but we are making

[Justin Tomlinson]

a genuine difference to some of those who are most desperate to be given an opportunity to work.

Wages are also increasing at 2.3% against inflation of 0.9%. I gently remind the SNP speakers, in particular the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), that inflation fell this week. I do not know whether that news escaped them.

**Ian Blackford** *rose*—

**Justin Tomlinson:** The hon. Gentleman has had plenty of opportunities to contribute to this debate and other Members still want to speak.

We are also significantly extending childcare with a doubling of free childcare coming in.

Specifically on universal credit, the key difference is that it provides additional much-needed support. We know how important it is. Only 1% of ESA claimants came off the benefit every month despite the vast majority wanting the opportunity to work. There will be additional childcare, which will be beneficial for lone parents in particular, the provision and identification of training opportunities and specific job search help. Most importantly for me, in-work support will be offered for the first time. Many people coming off that benefit will go into low-paid jobs. They will often then stay at that low level and not benefit from a growing economy. In-work support will be provided. Someone may be told, “Look, you have been going for three months. You have turned up and been a diligent worker. Perhaps it is now time to push for greater responsibility and greater earning opportunities.” That is something that is very much welcomed by people I talk to.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk highlighted the 16-hour cliff edge. He pointed out that his staff did not want to work extra hours. That is not quite the case. They were desperate to work additional hours, but they were just unable to work them, and that was blocking opportunity for them.

On ESA, I wish to take a moment to pay tribute to the staff in the jobcentres, the Work programme providers, including Shaw Trust, plus many other organisations and charities that support those activities. They do a huge amount of work that often goes unseen. They are often not thanked, but I know that they have made a real difference to many people and we are seeing that in the jobs figures.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green said, there has to be an emphasis on what people can do, rather than on what they cannot do. That is highlighted right the way through the very welcome Green Paper. I am proud to have made a small contribution to bringing that forward. It is very welcome that organisations such as Scope, Leonard Cheshire, the Royal National Institute Of Blind People, the National Autistic Society and hundreds of others are using their expertise and first-hand experience to help shape policy. I will continue to raise the importance of making them a priority in policy development and in delivering in the future.

We have already seen with the additional £60 million rising to £100 million that we will have more of a personalised and tailored approach. There will be quicker assessments, which is particularly important because

50% of people on ESA also have a mental health condition, and it is vital that we get support to them as quickly as possible. There will be a place on the new Work and Health programme, work choice for those who choose to volunteer, and additional places on the Specialist Employability Support programmes.

If anyone visits a jobcentre, they will understand how desperate people are to have those extra places. It is a bit like getting tickets for a very popular concert—first thing, once a month, it is about getting on the phone to try to grab those one or two available places. Job clubs will provide support, which will be delivered by peers, particularly those who have disabilities, who will give their first-hand experience and support. For many people, trying to return to the work environment is a very, very scary prospect.

There will be the new community partners and increased access to work for young people. There are also future opportunities, particularly through the Disability Confident campaign, which is very proactive in identifying to employers the huge wealth of talent that is out there if people will make a small change. I am particularly excited by the encouraging early results from the Small Employer Offer, which, in effect, doorsteps local employers saying that there is a wealth of talent out there. It asks what their skills gaps are and whether they can find the people to match them. Some really impressive results have been achieved.

We have seen increased funding for Access to Work. At the moment, it assists about 38,000 people. There will be funding in place for an additional 25,000 people. People who do not understand the scheme may say that it only helps 38,000. They ignore, or simply do not understand, how often we need to help people on only one occasion to then be able to get them into work. It could be by purchasing equipment, or by providing additional training. That person could then end up having a long-term sustainable career.

The other area is to make sure that the Fit for Work service supports people earlier than the four weeks, because, often, it is simple early advice, particularly to small employers, that will help keep people in work. It is far easier to keep people in work than to try to get them back in. Finally, we need to make sure that the charities are central to the delivery, because they have so much proactive experience. Their policy teams are constructive. When I was a Minister, it was a real pleasure to work with those organisations. Through the Green Paper, they can help to make a real difference.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am sorry, but I have to reduce the time limit to five minutes. I call Alison McGovern.

3.32 pm

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson). I admire his ambition and commitment to people with disabilities. Unfortunately, I do not admire the changes that the Government have made, especially the Work programme, which prevented the kind of work with charities that he was just describing. It is a shame that words do not always match reality. That is the nub of what I want to say in my brief five-minute speech.

Today, the Oxford English dictionary added “post-truth” to its long list of words. It is a phrase with which we have become all too familiar over the recent year or so. I place the blame for that squarely on our own shoulders. The public disconnect from the words that we say when they do not match the reality of what they experience.

Another phrase that we learned about in the Brexit debate was the “end of experts”. That is true no more of any profession than of our economists. Far too often, we have seen our economy described in a way that simply does not match up with what the average ordinary person wants in our country.

The point I want to make to Ministers today is that we have a choice about what we offer the British people. We must consider whether we are prepared to face the reality of our decisions. In the end, I feel very strongly that they should publish the distributional analysis—this is what I want to focus on rather than the specifics of ESA. In the end, what matters is the money in people’s pockets. We do not want a repeat of what we saw in the last Parliament, which is the better off half of our country doing well and those with the least doing the worst. If that happens again, it will not be the Budget book but people’s own bank balances that tell them, so we might as well be honest and up front about it.

A couple of Members have mentioned the prospect of inflation and the fact that the autumn statement needs to respond to the possible risks ahead. Because of Brexit, however, we simply do not know what is going to happen to our economy. Uncertainty has increased radically and British people face a more unstable situation than ever before, so the least they can expect from us is clarity and the knowledge that we have looked squarely at the consequences of our decisions.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am sorry that I missed the first part of the debate, but I have been in Committee. As an example of the uncertainty, the hon. Lady will be aware of the collapse in the value of sterling since the Brexit vote, but she may not be aware that as a direct and perverse result of that, the UK’s contribution to the European Union is now £2.5 billion a year more than it was in June. Does she not think it ironic that that alone would cover half the costs of the cuts that are being debated here this afternoon?

**Alison McGovern:** For the good of my constituents, I have never advocated our leaving the European Union and I still do not. Why damage the relationship that we have with our European partners such that they put such high numbers on the table? The hon. Gentleman makes a good point.

We can choose to face squarely the consequences of our actions or we can try to hide them from ourselves. I ask Ministers to consider the steps that they took in the previous Parliament to undermine people’s confidence in us as a body politic that wants to deal with poverty and inequality in our country. Among the consequences of the decisions taken in the previous Parliament—including, despite his welcome contribution earlier, those taken by the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith)—are a steep rise in child poverty that looks set to continue and will see 3.6 million children in relative poverty by 2020. It is no wonder that steps were taken to undermine the clarity of the Child Poverty Act 2010 that meant that we could

never hide from the impact of our decisions on the children who depend on us all for a decent life and a decent future.

The Minister mentioned childcare several times. Unfortunately, that is a promise in words only. Families across the country are still not able to access the childcare they need to get to work, and the consequences of the Minister’s decisions mean that we are staring in the face the possibility of single parents being hit hardest, given the changes to universal credit. Ministers should make the right choice, be honest and up front, and allow scrutiny. Let us get this right together. We need to be clear and transparent. At the last Budget, the distributional analysis was not good enough and the IFS produced its own analysis anyway. It did not take long for the obfuscation to be revealed. Others will find out and analysis will make the position clear. Most importantly, our constituents will know. They will see the consequences in their bank balance and in the money in their pockets, and they will not forgive us.

3.38 pm

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is almost a year to the day that I stood here making my maiden speech and joining Members from all parts of the House to ask for reconsideration of the planned tax credit cuts. We understood and supported the need to reduce the welfare bill, but the planned cuts would have left a gaping hole in low-earning family incomes.

Looking back, that was an easy argument to win. No one with a compassionate bone in their body would have thought it good policy to cut the incomes of low-paid working families before replacement systems were put in place, in the form of the national minimum wage and tax threshold increases. However, the reprieve and relief that came in last year’s autumn statement were short-lived, and the legacy work allowance reductions are still embedded in universal credit. Only its slow roll-out has stopped the ticking time bomb exploding.

Our mission now, as it was last year, is to ensure that everyone understands the risks of leaving universal credit as it stands. Although Brexit continues to dominate the headlines, we need to keep our Prime Minister’s vision of creating a Government that works for the “just managing” focused and equipped to deliver. We must demonstrate that we are not only a competent Conservative Government, but a compassionate Conservative Government. It is the detail that matters. It means going beyond the headline statistics and looking at the human detail—the cost, the names on the spreadsheets. It means getting to grips with the impact analysis of policy change.

Life is still very hard for families on low incomes. The high cost of accommodation, low wage growth, rising inflation—apart from today—and the cost of living mean that the transformation of our benefits/work system is not yet over. Brexit means that it may not be business as usual for quite some time; if anything, the economic volatility on the way means that things are about to get a whole lot harder—an estimated £1,000 a year in earnings harder, and that is before we even get on to talking about the cuts in universal credit.

Families transitioning from tax credits to universal credit will receive financial protection; that is a sensible decision, and that is the good that Government can do. A national minimum wage, recent income tax cuts and

[Heidi Allen]

30 hours of free childcare—assuming it can be delivered—are the good that Government can do. However, understanding that those three very positive policies still will not offset the cuts in universal credit for the poorest third of families to the tune of £500 a year is the good impact analysis that Government can do.

Brexit has polarised society, with divisions running through communities and even across family dining tables. The Prime Minister has vowed to lead for all, repair those rifts and reunite our country. On both sides of the House, we will struggle to explain that vision to the 3 million families who will be worse off on universal credit than their legacy tax credit neighbours. We can deliver unity only if we treat all just-managing families the same.

Keeping the work allowances in universal credit at the reduced levels set in the summer Budget last year means a single parent without housing costs will be up to £2,800 a year worse off than their tax credit next-door neighbour. A couple with children and no housing costs will be up to £1,200 a year worse off than their tax credit next-door neighbour.

Universal credit has it in it to be the greatest enabler of social change this country has seen in decades. Funded as it was intended, it will support people every step of the way as they make their transition to independence from the state.

Let us get out of our well-heeled shoes and put ourselves in someone else's for a day. If I were a single mum with little family support, working 10 hours on the national minimum wage and taking home about £240 a week, would I work another 12 hours just to take home a further £36? I am sorry, but I probably would not, and I am coming from a starting point of mental comfort and emotional calm.

Effective policy must understand the lives of the people who will be affected by it. To keep this country firing on all cylinders post-Brexit, we need the workers who run the engine to be able to afford to operate it. I have said it before, and I will say it again: we need every teaching assistant, every careworker, every cleaner and every shop worker to secure our future, and if people are not supported into work, and up in work the engine—the country's engine—stops turning over. Is it really worth taking a risk with that?

There are options to better fund universal credit. We could review the arbitrary 2.5% factor embedded in the pension triple lock, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) mentioned, or we could review the planned further income tax allowance changes and question whether that expenditure is being efficiently directed to the right audience.

Quite simply, we need to give universal credit its mojo back, and that means restoring the work allowances that drive it. Only if we do that will the wording of the Government's amendment—that “work pays” under universal credit—be true. Currently, as work allowances are set, it is not.

I could go on for longer on the subject of universal credit, but I would run out of time, so I will turn to the aspect of the motion that deals with employment and support allowance. I will be brief for I suspect that most Members know where I stand on this.

**Mr Burrowes:** How much of a priority is it that we make changes ahead of this autumn statement, rather than waiting until April?

**Heidi Allen:** I think it would send a message and set the fiscal tone that this Government care and are listening to those who, as I mentioned, are running our engine. It would set the tone by saying that this country is, and will continue to be, open for business and can afford to run itself.

Turning to employment and support allowance, I am, of course, delighted that we have a Green Paper coming, and early signs from disability charities are that it is being very well received. However, it is still only a Green Paper and is still subject to consultation, so I remain uncomfortable, just as I was back in February, that the £30 per week planned cut is still in place.

With a new Prime Minister and a new Government, we have a priceless opportunity to build a system that supports and realises the aspirations of people with disabilities. That clearly and rightly is the Government's mission, so let us not waste it by retrospectively fitting policies to savings targets agreed in a different era.

3.44 pm

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): This has been a detailed and thorough debate, in which we have heard from 10 speakers. I will begin by responding to the Minister's comments. I should state for clarity that this Government are borrowing more now than any previous Labour Government have borrowed in the past. We certainly welcome the reduction in the disability employment gap, but unfortunately it shows that the Government have simply stood still, because the situation got worse over the past year. The Minister did not answer the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) asked about the commitment to halve the disability employment gap by 2020.

I am glad that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) has suddenly seen the light, but why did he not do something about the issues faced by the social security system when he was Secretary of State?

My hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman) made important points about the distribution analysis and the impact on child poverty. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) made an interesting speech, but I refer him to the IFS data that show that cuts to universal credit work allowances mean that the incentives for single parents to enter into work have been significantly weakened. Similarly, the Child Poverty Action Group has described the cuts as being in direct contradiction to the policy's stated agenda of making work pay.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) for highlighting her constituents' issues, particularly with the distribution analysis and the impact on the poorest, as opposed to the richest. The former Minister with responsibility for disabled people, the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), said that nobody has explained how our proposal would be funded. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington said at the beginning, the Resolution Foundation has shown that

reversing the cuts to capital gains tax, corporation tax and inheritance tax would be more than sufficient.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) made a characteristically comprehensive speech. Her passionate and regular campaigning on child poverty does her and our party credit. The same is true of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen), who is brave to speak out on the issues so eloquently and so often.

There are 6.8 million adults in this country who are in working households but who live in poverty. Two out of three of the nearly 4 million children living in poverty are from working households. All the evidence points to the simple truth that, under this Government, work is not a route out of poverty. I contrast that with the achievements of the previous Labour Government, who reduced poverty across the board.

Our disabled people have been battered by this Government, too. Some 5 million disabled people currently live in poverty in the UK—nearly one in three—and the gains made by Labour are now in reverse. Although disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to live in poverty, specifically as a result of their disability or condition, the Government cut £28 billion from 3.7 million disabled people as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, thereby increasing the likelihood of poverty.

As we have heard, the IFS has shown that people on low incomes have been most adversely affected by the Government's changes to tax and social security support since 2010, and that that will continue. In other words, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

Landman Economics and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research estimate that poor families with a disabled adult or child have been made five times worse off than non-disabled families, through tax and social security changes. Of course, that does not even factor in other spending cuts. There is ample evidence.

Several measures in the Welfare Reform Act 2016 further punish the sick and disabled, but the cuts to employment and support allowance and the related cuts to the limited capability for work element of universal credit are among the most troubling. Nearly half a million people will be affected when the measure comes in next April, losing around £30 a week or £1,500 a year—a third of their weekly income from ESA. Those are people who have been found by the Government's flawed work capability assessment process to be not fit for work, but who might be in the future. The Minister's argument that these cuts will incentivise sick and disabled people into work is baseless and deeply offensive. In fact, the Government published this summer their own research showing absolutely the opposite. The policy does not incentivise people; it makes the situation worse. We must stop using this “shirker” and “scrounger” rhetoric, which is harmful and wrong.

I remind Ministers that the Government's data show that the death rate for people on incapacity benefit and ESA in 2013 was 4.3 times that of the general population; that figure increased from 3.6 in 2003. People in the support group are 6.3 times more likely to die than the general population, and people in the WRAG—the people from whom the Government will be cutting more money—are more than twice as likely to die as the general population. IB and ESA are recognised as good population health indicators, and the Government's data prove that point.

Consultation on the Government's work, health and disability Green Paper will barely have finished before the cuts are imposed. I am sceptical that the measure will address the issues that sick and disabled people face, and I fear that it will be just another means to get people off flow. Last year, the Government failed to produce evidence of the cumulative effect of their further cuts on disabled people living in poverty, saying that it was too difficult. Labour disagreed, as did the Equality and Human Rights Commission, disability charities and disabled people's organisations. Reporting last week, the UN committee that investigated breaches by this Government of the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities also disagreed. The UN's report concluded that “grave and systematic violations” of disabled people's rights had been perpetrated by this Government.

In the same week as the UN published its damning report, the Trussell Trust released data on the increase in food bank use because of social security issues, and the Supreme Court ruled against the Government on the discriminatory bedroom tax as it related to disabled people and their carers. The film “I, Daniel Blake” epitomises what is wrong with the social security system, in an accurate and moving representation of what is happening in this country. Surely, the Government must see red. They must do the right thing and reverse the cuts to ESA WRAG.

On universal credit, we supported the principles of the Government's flagship programme when it was first introduced: to unify a complex system into a single payment and to ensure that work pays. However, since its inception, universal credit has gone from damage limitation to outright disaster. In particular—apart from the Government's gross incompetence in its costly implementation—the £3.8 billion of cuts to work allowances significantly undermine the principle that work will always pay under the scheme.

Research by the Resolution Foundation showed that the cuts will leave 2.5 million working families on average £2,100 a year worse off. The Resolution Foundation estimated that the poorest 50% of households will be £375 worse off on average by 2021, while the other half will be £235 better off. Those already on UC will be hit first. House of Commons Library analysis shows that the cuts will mean that a single mother of two who works full time on the minimum wage will lose £2,400 a year. Further analysis by Liverpool Economics has shown that disabled people in work will lose £2,000 a year. The north—particularly the north-west, where UC started—has been hit first: from powerhouse to workhouse. Once again, the Government have failed to publish an impact assessment on the effects of the cuts. The Government's cuts to UC work allowances, replacing tax credits and topping up income for people in work on low pay, are undermining the principle of making work pay. I repeat the call to reverse these cuts.

In conclusion, the Government's arguments to justify the cuts to UC work allowances are without any evidence. In contrast, there is a clear and growing evidence base on the effects that these cuts are having on the working poor and on sick and disabled people. At the same time, there is increasing evidence that as a nation we are becoming more and more unequal. After six years, the Government have done next to nothing to curb boardroom pay, giving tax breaks to the highest earners. Last year,

[Debbie Abrahams]

the average worker's pay of £27,645 increased by less than 2%; by comparison, the average top executive pay of £5 million increased by nearly 50%. The impacts of those inequalities are already being felt. The very fabric of our society—who we are and what we stand for as a tolerant and just society—is under attack as a result of these inequalities. The Prime Minister's warm words about tackling injustice are not enough. We need action, not just words.

3.55 pm

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** May I associate myself with the sentiments expressed by the shadow Chancellor about the late Debbie Jolly? She was a noted researcher and sociologist, as well as a tireless campaigner. I am sure that our comments will be just two of the many tributes that will be paid to her.

I thank all right hon. and hon. Members for their contributions to this debate. It has been a lean-but-fit Opposition day debate, and I will try to make my reply lean and fit as well.

Let me answer the question asked by the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) about the disability employment gap. I am sure he is aware of the evidence the Work and Pensions Committee has taken on the complexity involved in measuring and tracking progress on the gap. I am taking a much more low-brow approach. All Members will shortly receive an invite to an event in this place on 5 December, when they will receive information not just about the Green Paper and how they can get involved in the consultation at local level, but about the focus on unmet and existing needs in their local area. We will crack this—getting services to focus on what we need to do not just to halve the gap, but to close it completely—by, for example, looking at exactly how many people with learning difficulties there are in their constituency for whom roles need to be carved out.

**Stephen Timms:** Will the Minister give way?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I am sorry, but I am very short of time.

The welfare state is a safety net, but—done well—it should anticipate, empower, be seamless with other services, be unbureaucratic, have commonsense and compassion at its heart, and be focused on helping someone in their ambitions as well as on their basic needs. In the last quarter, there have been many tweaks to the system, some so dry and small that they have not registered with the House. Others have registered, such as the decision to stop reassessments for those with degenerative conditions, the increase in the number of groups able to access hardship funds, and our concerns—they have been expressed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions today—about sanctions on people with mental health conditions.

We will continue to work methodically through the improvement plan: reducing the number of people having to go to appeal to get the right decision; ensuring that our programmes work better and improving them; ensuring we have the reach we need; and building capacity and expertise in our organisations. That will build on the substantial reforms already carried out by my right

hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) and my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson). I pay tribute to them for the work they have done.

The proof that we have listened and understood will be seen in our actions. A person's experience of the system and their support is the only thing that will assure confidence, but I hope this debate will afford me the opportunity to reassure colleagues on both sides of the House about the specifics that have been raised. To deliver well, we must understand the impact of a policy on people who are often in complex situations and under considerable strain and challenge. There is the challenge of budgeting for those who have suddenly had to stop work or have lost employment due to their condition, ill health or accident, or the challenge of facing increased costs, or both.

Hon. Members have pointed to three concerns. First, there is a person's liquidity—their ability to afford the additional costs of looking for work and being poorly or disabled. Someone with a neurological condition will spend almost £200 a week on costs related to their disability, and hon. Members on both sides of the House have raised concerns about that. Secondly—this is often exacerbated by the first—there is a person's dignity and mental wellbeing. Thirdly, there is the obvious point that someone is more likely to get into work and make a success of it, as well as to recover from ill health, if they are able to devote themselves to that. If they have other worries or concerns, their energy and focus on their objectives will be diluted. Many who find themselves in receipt of universal credit or ESA will already have complex situations to deal with, and the delivery of our services should not add to that.

Let me briefly touch on each of those three concerns. To inform our view of the income needed by the range of people we are considering, we have relied heavily on the work of third parties, most notably Macmillan and Scope. Personal independence payments will be able to help some people with some of those costs, but not with them all. More is therefore needed, and more will be provided.

First, there is the flexible support fund, a discretionary fund that is used by work coaches to provide local support for the costs related to getting into work, such as travel to and from training and travel costs when in work. As part of the enhanced offer, we have committed an additional £15 million to that fund over the next two years. The partners we work with are aware of the fund and signpost people to our work coaches, so that they can access it.

Secondly, we have schemes such as the travel discount scheme for those on ESA, universal credit and jobseeker's allowance. Thirdly, we are continuing our work that focuses on sectors such as energy costs and insurance. In relation to April's changes, we are doing new work with key providers, such as mobile and broadband providers, to see whether they can offer further help. Where there is existing help, we must ensure that our clients know about it. We are building on the excellent work that Scope has done through the Extra Costs Commission to drive down costs and utilise the consumer power of this group of people.

In the context of this debate, I am working to provide a greater number of ways to reduce a person's personal outgoings by next spring by using funds to alleviate the costs directly related to work, negotiating better deals

on expenditure not directly related to employment and extending the hardship fund with immediate effect. That will use new money from the Treasury over the next four years.

Happily, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon helpfully outlined the measures in the Green Paper, which will be key to supporting those who are in the WRAG. That support may not seem relevant to some hon. Members, who understandably have focused purely on liquidity, but we have a duty to do more than provide what can only be limited financial support. We must also provide a way through to the workplace for the many who want to be there. No Government support can ever compensate for a pay cheque and the financial resilience, health and wellbeing that come with it. That is why, in the last Parliament, we increased the benefits that contribute to the additional costs of disability and care and the elements of ESA that are paid to people with the most severe work-limiting conditions and disabilities.

The changes that we deliver in April will provide more support to those people—something that I hope all will welcome. Alongside that, we will ensure that the focus on personal liquidity, dignity and the ability to focus on one's health and work ambitions is maintained. We will invest in helping a person out of their situation, rather than helping them endure it. We will support people's ambitions as well as their basic needs. We will enable them to build their future, as well as helping them in the here and now.

*Question put (Standing Order No. 31(2)).* That the original words stand part of the Question.

*The House divided: Ayes 265, Noes 284.*

### Division No. 82]

[4.2 pm

#### AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Burgon, Richard
Abrahams, Debbie	Burnham, rh Andy
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Butler, Dawn
Alexander, Heidi	Byrne, rh Liam
Ali, Rushanara	Cadbury, Ruth
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Cameron, Dr Lisa
Arkless, Richard	Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Ashworth, Jonathan	Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Champion, Sarah
Bardell, Hannah	Chapman, Douglas
Barron, rh Sir Kevin	Chapman, Jenny
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cherry, Joanna
Berger, Luciana	Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Betts, Mr Clive	Clwyd, rh Ann
Black, Mhairi	Coaker, Vernon
Blackford, Ian	Cooper, Julie
Blackman, Kirsty	Cooper, rh Yvette
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Blenkinsop, Tom	Cowan, Ronnie
Blomfield, Paul	Coyle, Neil
Boswell, Philip	Crausby, Mr David
Brabin, Tracy	Crawley, Angela
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Creagh, Mary
Brake, rh Tom	Creasy, Stella
Brennan, Kevin	Cruddas, Jon
Brock, Deidre	Cryer, John
Brown, Alan	Cummins, Judith
Brown, Lyn	Cunningham, Alex
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Bryant, Chris	Dakin, Nic
Buck, Ms Karen	Danczuk, Simon

David, Wayne	Jones, Helen
Davies, Geraint	Jones, Mr Kevan
Day, Martyn	Jones, Susan Elan
Docherty-Hughes, Martin	Kane, Mike
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Keeley, Barbara
Donaldson, Stuart Blair	Kendall, Liz
Doughty, Stephen	Kerr, Calum
Dowd, Jim	Kinahan, Danny
Dowd, Peter	Kinnock, Stephen
Dromey, Jack	Kyle, Peter
Durkan, Mark	Lamb, rh Norman
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lammy, rh Mr David
Eagle, Maria	Lavery, Ian
Edwards, Jonathan	Law, Chris
Efford, Clive	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Elliott, Julie	Lewis, Clive
Elliott, Tom	Lewis, Mr Ivan
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Elmore, Chris	Lucas, Caroline
Esterson, Bill	Lucas, Ian C.
Evans, Chris	Lynch, Holly
Farrelly, Paul	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Farron, Tim	Madders, Justin
Ferrier, Margaret	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Field, rh Frank	Malhotra, Seema
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Mann, John
Flelo, Robert	Marris, Rob
Fletcher, Colleen	Maskell, Rachael
Flynn, Paul	Matheson, Christian
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCaig, Callum
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCarthy, Kerry
Furniss, Gill	McDonagh, Siobhain
Gapes, Mike	McDonald, Andy
Gethins, Stephen	McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stuart C.
Glass, Pat	McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
Glindon, Mary	McDonnell, rh John
Godsiff, Mr Roger	McFadden, rh Mr Pat
Goodman, Helen	McGarry, Natalie
Grady, Patrick	McGovern, Alison
Grant, Peter	McInnes, Liz
Gray, Neil	McLaughlin, Anne
Green, Kate	McMahon, Jim
Greenwood, Margaret	Meale, Sir Alan
Griffith, Nia	Mearns, Ian
Gwynne, Andrew	Miliband, rh Edward
Haigh, Louise	Monaghan, Carol
Hanson, rh Mr David	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Harris, Carolyn	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Hayes, Helen	Morden, Jessica
Hayman, Sue	Mulholland, Greg
Healey, rh John	Mullin, Roger
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Murray, Ian
Hendry, Drew	Nandy, Lisa
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Newlands, Gavin
Hillier, Meg	Nicolson, John
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	O'Hara, Brendan
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Onn, Melanie
Hoey, Kate	Onwurah, Chi
Hollern, Kate	Osamor, Kate
Hollobone, Mr Philip	Oswald, Kirsten
Hopkins, Kelvin	Owen, Albert
Hosie, Stewart	Paterson, Steven
Howarth, rh Mr George	Pearce, Teresa
Hunt, Tristram	Perkins, Toby
Huq, Dr Rupa	Phillips, Jess
Hussain, Imran	Phillipson, Bridget
Jarvis, Dan	Pound, Stephen
Johnson, rh Alan	Powell, Lucy
Johnson, Diana	Pugh, John
Jones, Gerald	Qureshi, Yasmin
Jones, Graham	Rayner, Angela

Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Emma  
Reynolds, Jonathan  
Rimmer, Marie  
Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
Robertson, rh Angus  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shannon, Jim  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sheppard, Tommy  
Sherriff, Paula  
Shuker, Mr Gavin  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Simpson, David  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
Smith, Angela  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh Mr John  
Stephens, Chris  
Stevens, Jo  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
Tami, Mark

Thewliss, Alison  
Thomas, Mr Gareth  
Thompson, Owen  
Thornberry, Emily  
Timms, rh Stephen  
Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Umunna, Mr Chuka  
Vaz, rh Keith  
Vaz, Valerie  
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  
Wishart, Pete  
Woodcock, John  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Jeff Smith and**  
**Thangam Debbonaire**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Argar, Edward  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, Stephen  
Baron, Mr John  
Bebb, Guto  
Bellingham, Sir Henry  
Benyon, Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Berry, James  
Bingham, Andrew  
Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Borwick, Victoria  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Mr Graham  
Brazier, Mr Julian  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh James  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Robert  
Burns, Conor  
Burns, rh Sir Simon  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Cartledge, James  
Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria  
Chishty, Rehman  
Chope, Mr Christopher  
Churchill, Jo  
Clark, rh Greg  
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
Cleverly, James  
Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
Collins, Damian  
Colville, Oliver  
Costa, Alberto  
Courts, Robert  
Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
Crabb, rh Stephen  
Crouch, Tracey  
Davies, Chris  
Davies, David T. C.  
Davies, Glyn  
Davies, Dr James  
Davies, Mims  
Davies, Philip  
Davis, rh Mr David  
Dinamage, Caroline  
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
Dorries, Nadine  
Double, Steve  
Dowden, Oliver  
Doyle-Price, Jackie  
Drax, Richard  
Drummond, Mrs Flick  
Duddridge, James  
Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
Dunne, Mr Philip  
Ellis, Michael  
Ellison, Jane  
Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
Elphicke, Charlie

Eustice, George  
Evans, Graham  
Evans, Mr Nigel  
Evennett, rh David  
Fabricant, Michael  
Fernandes, Suella  
Field, rh Mark  
Foster, Kevin  
Francois, rh Mr Mark  
Freeman, George  
Freer, Mike  
Fuller, Richard  
Fysh, Marcus  
Gale, Sir Roger  
Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
Garnier, Mark  
Ghani, Nusrat  
Gibb, Mr Nick  
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
Glen, John  
Goodwill, Mr Robert  
Gove, rh Michael  
Grant, Mrs Helen  
Gray, Mr James  
Grayling, rh Chris  
Green, Chris  
Green, rh Damian  
Greening, rh Justine  
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
Griffiths, Andrew  
Gummer, rh Ben  
Gyimah, Mr Sam  
Halfon, rh Robert  
Hall, Luke  
Hammond, Stephen  
Hancock, rh Matt  
Hands, rh Greg  
Harper, rh Mr Mark  
Harrington, Richard  
Harris, Rebecca  
Hart, Simon  
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
Hayes, rh Mr John  
Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
Heapey, James  
Heaton-Jones, Peter  
Henderson, Gordon  
Herbert, rh Nick  
Hinds, Damian  
Hoare, Simon  
Hollingbery, George  
Hollinrake, Kevin  
Holloway, Mr Adam  
Howarth, Sir Gerald  
Howell, John  
Howlett, Ben  
Huddleston, Nigel  
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
Jackson, Mr Stewart  
James, Margot  
Javid, rh Sajid  
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
Jenkyns, Andrea  
Jenrick, Robert  
Johnson, rh Boris  
Johnson, Gareth  
Johnson, Joseph  
Jones, Andrew  
Jones, Mr Marcus  
Kawczynski, Daniel  
Kennedy, Seema  
Knight, rh Sir Greg

Knight, Julian  
Kwarteng, Kwasi  
Lancaster, Mark  
Latham, Pauline  
Lee, Dr Phillip  
Lefroy, Jeremy  
Leigh, Sir Edward  
Leslie, Charlotte  
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
Lewis, rh Brandon  
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
Lidington, rh Mr David  
Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
Lopresti, Jack  
Lord, Jonathan  
Loughton, Tim  
Mackinlay, Craig  
Mackintosh, David  
Main, Mrs Anne  
Mak, Mr Alan  
Malthouse, Kit  
May, rh Mrs Theresa  
Maynard, Paul  
McCartney, Karl  
McPartland, Stephen  
Menzies, Mark  
Mercer, Johnny  
Merriman, Huw  
Metcalfe, Stephen  
Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
Milling, Amanda  
Mills, Nigel  
Milton, rh Anne  
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
Mordaunt, Penny  
Morgan, rh Nicky  
Morris, David  
Morris, James  
Morton, Wendy  
Mowat, David  
Mundell, rh David  
Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
Neill, Robert  
Newton, Sarah  
Nokes, Caroline  
Norman, Jesse  
Nuttall, Mr David  
Offord, Dr Matthew  
Opperman, Guy  
Parish, Neil  
Patel, rh Priti  
Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
Pawsey, Mark  
Penning, rh Mike  
Penrose, John  
Percy, Andrew  
Perry, Claire  
Philp, Chris  
Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
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  
Robinson, Mary  
Rosindell, Andrew

Rudd, rh Amber	Tolhurst, Kelly
Rutley, David	Tomlinson, Justin
Sandbach, Antoinette	Tomlinson, Michael
Scully, Paul	Tracey, Craig
Selous, Andrew	Tredinnick, David
Shapps, rh Grant	Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Sharma, Alok	Truss, rh Elizabeth
Shelbrooke, Alec	Tugendhat, Tom
Simpson, rh Mr Keith	Turner, Mr Andrew
Skidmore, Chris	Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Henry	Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Smith, Julian	Vara, Mr Shailesh
Smith, Royston	Vickers, Martin
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas	Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Solloway, Amanda	Walker, Mr Charles
Soubry, rh Anna	Walker, Mr Robin
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline	Wallace, Mr Ben
Spencer, Mark	Warburton, David
Stephenson, Andrew	Warman, Matt
Stevenson, John	Wharton, James
Stewart, Bob	Whately, Helen
Stewart, Iain	Wheeler, Heather
Stewart, Rory	White, Chris
Streeter, Mr Gary	Whittaker, Craig
Stride, Mel	Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Stuart, Graham	Williams, Craig
Sturdy, Julian	Williamson, rh Gavin
Sunak, Rishi	Wilson, Mr Rob
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond	Wood, Mike
Swire, rh Sir Hugo	Wright, rh Jeremy
Syms, Mr Robert	
Thomas, Derek	
Throup, Maggie	
Timpson, Edward	

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Chris Heaton-Harris and**  
**Christopher Pincher**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

*Question agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the role of universal credit in ensuring that work pays; welcomes the £60 million package of additional employment support announced in the Summer Budget 2016 available to new claimants with limited capability for work from April 2017 and set out in the recent Work and Health Green Paper; further welcomes the proposals for employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions set out in that green paper; and notes the comments by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Treasury Committee on 19 October 2016 on his intention to publish distributional analysis at the forthcoming Autumn Statement.

## Social Care

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** I inform the House that Mr Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.18 pm

**Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House notes the serious concerns expressed about the social care system, including by the Local Government Association, The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services and the Care Quality Commission; calls on the Government to urgently bring forward promised funding to address the current funding crisis and to put in place a longer-term settlement to ensure that the social care system is sustainable going forward; and further calls on the Government to ensure that the most vulnerable in society are guaranteed the adequate and sustainable care they deserve.

**The Government amendment**

“commends the work and dedication of those in the social care sector”.

I join the Government in that. It might be the only part of their amendment I support. It is right that we praise our care staff. Unison the union had a meeting here today with care staff from a London borough and from Leicestershire. They talked about the difficult financial situation facing care services. Some care providers are not paying a decent wage. I heard all about that from the care staff from the London borough. Care staff receive less than the national minimum wage. They are not paid for travel time and they are not paid the correct rate if they sleep over. We should value our care staff more highly, we should pay them properly, we should train them, and they should know that they do a valued job. I pay tribute to the care staff I met today. I hope that other hon. Members also attended that event and met the same care staff and that they read Unison’s report, which is called “Care in Crisis”.

Social care is “in crisis” owing to a lack of funding. So says the Conservative leader of the Local Government Association’s community wellbeing board, Councillor Izzi Seccombe, who says that

“it is no exaggeration to say that our care and support system is in crisis.”

Richard Humphries, of the King’s Fund, talks of “a deeper existential crisis of care”.

The Care Quality Commission says that the sustainability of social care is seen as “approaching tipping point”. Ray James, of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, says that

“the Government must face up to the reality that social care is in crisis now and provide immediate funding to stabilise the sector.”

On the priority of providing extra funding for social care, NHS England chief executive, Simon Stevens, says that

“there is a strong argument that were extra funding to be available...we should be arguing that it should be going to social care.”

I could go on. Googling the words “social care funding crisis” returns 2 million results.

**Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab):** It is stating the obvious to say there is insufficient money going into the system, yet we have private companies taking huge profits out of the system as well. Will my hon. Friend

[Alex Cunningham]

join me in commending Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council for setting up a not-for-profit organisation to ensure that the money goes into services instead of shareholders' pockets?

**Barbara Keeley:** I certainly will join my hon. Friend in commending the council. It is one of the things we talked about to the care staff today. Why should people be paid vast profits from public money, when care staff are so badly paid?

The reasons for the social care funding crisis are clear: insufficient funding in the face of growing demand and a fragile market in the provision of social care. We know that people are living longer and that demand on social care services continues to increase. People aged 85 and over are the group most likely to need care, and their numbers are projected to rise sharply in the coming years. Moreover, the gap between need and funding has grown wider since 2010.

**Robert Flello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): According to the sustainability and transformation plan for Staffordshire, some of which has been leaked to me, NHS England and NHS Improvement having categorically refused to make it available to Members of Parliament, shows a deficit for Staffordshire over the coming years of more than £250 million. Is that not appalling?

**Barbara Keeley:** It is dreadful. The deficit in Greater Manchester is £1.75 billion, so the problem is the same up and down the country.

We have had six years of Government cuts to local authority budgets, and that has seen local authority spending on the care and support needs of older and disabled people fall by 11% in real terms. In fact, the number of people getting publicly funded support has plummeted: 400,000 fewer now than in 2009-10. Such facts are shocking, but behind the statistics are real issues: the impact that cuts to social care are having on the NHS, on people who need care and on unpaid family carers.

First, I will deal with the issues that the crisis in social care causes for the NHS. As the Nuffield Trust states:

"Hospitals have struggled to meet the needs of the older age group in a timely way, in both emergency departments and inpatient admissions".

The most visible manifestation of the pressures caused by cuts to social care budgets is the rapid growth of delayed transfers of care from hospital. The September figure of over 196,000 delay days is another record—the highest figure for six years—and it comes not in winter but at the end of summer. That means for the NHS 6,700 patients stuck in hospital. The most common causes are waiting for a care home placement and waiting for a nursing home placement.

The funding that was supposed to help with these issues is the better care fund, but there is no extra funding for social care in the fund this year and only £100 million next year.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does she agree that it would be useful to remind Conservative Members of the Conservative party manifesto? Page 65—I do not

want anyone to struggle to find it—outlines the promise to the people concerned. It says that they would not have

"to sell their home to pay for care",

and that there would be a cap on charges to give people "peace of mind" and protection. All that is in the Conservative party manifesto—"peace of mind" and protection "from unlimited costs". It amounts to a cruel disservice to that generation that the Government went back on that promise just two months into this Session.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is, and I agree with my hon. Friend that care costs are just running away with themselves, making it much harder for people.

The bulk of the extra funding that the Government promised to social care from the better care fund comes in 2018-19 and 2019-20. We have had six years of cuts to local authority budgets, and the extra funding promised for social care is backloaded to those later years in this Parliament.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned the most common causes of delayed transfers of care. However, I know that in hospitals in Kent near my constituency, around 30% of the delayed transfers of care are attributable to delays in social care and the majority are for other reasons. Does she not agree that it is important for the NHS to take its own steps within its own organisations to improve people's discharge from hospital?

**Barbara Keeley:** That is what we are debating. Of course the NHS should put its own house in order, too, but delays should not happen on account of social care. People should not be stuck for weeks or months in hospital, waiting for a care home placement or a nursing home placement. I shall go on to say why.

Returning to the issue of the backloading of funding, in view of what was happening to social care, the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services appealed before the last autumn statement for £700 million of the promised better care funding to be moved forward to this year and next year. That appeal was ignored. Reacting to that, Ray James of ADASS said:

"Ministers must know that their proposals do not deliver sufficient funding to meet the growing number of older and disabled people requiring increasingly complex care and support... The Council Tax precept will raise least money in areas of greatest need which risks heightening inequality. Councils in deprived areas will have greatest social care needs, yet they will raise less than a third of what more affluent areas do through this approach."

He went on by clarifying that ADASS does

"not believe that the funding for the next couple of years will anywhere near meet the costs of the national living wage and the increasing demand for social care."

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In my Hull constituency, not only have we seen massive cuts to the local government budget since 2010, but the precept that we can raise—2%—is much smaller than the gap in the budget for social care. By comparison, wealthier areas of Yorkshire such as East Riding are able to raise far more, so this is a double whammy for deprived areas.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is indeed. The gap in my Salford local authority area is £1.1 million. We can raise only £1.6 million from the social care precept, while just paying the national living wage in the care sector is costing us £2.7 million.

Let me return to the matter of where the promised funding sits. In our motion, we call on the Government once again

“to bring forward promised funding”

for 2019-20

“to address the current funding crisis”

in social care. I am sure that the Health Secretary hears plenty about the impacts on the NHS of the missing funding for social care, but let us also think about the impacts on the people who actually need that care.

The hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) mentioned the thousands of patients stuck in hospital. We should be aware that keeping them there longer than necessary can have a number of detrimental effects. Long stays can affect patient morale and patient mobility, and of course increase patients’ risk of catching hospital-acquired infections.

Effects on mobility can be particularly keenly felt by older patients. As Professor John Young said in the 2014 national audit of intermediary care:

“A wait of more than two days negates the additional benefit of intermediate care, and seven days is associated with a 10% decline in muscle strength.”

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, observed when the Committee published its own report on discharging older people from hospitals:

“Delayed discharge is damaging the health of patients and that of the public purse.”

Cuts to the funding of social care also affect a larger group of older and vulnerable people, and those cuts are now having a major impact on family carers. Age UK estimates that more than a million older people in England are living with unmet social care needs. I was struck by what the Unison staff told me about the many people they see during their care visits who are lonely and isolated.

Social care services have clearly failed to keep pace with increasing demand. Carers UK tells us that the drop in social care support, in the context of the increasing needs of our ageing population, is having a profound impact on the unpaid family carers who are stepping in to provide more care than ever before. It also tells us that the increase in the number of people providing care, and the increased number of hours of care that they provide, are being delivered at a huge personal cost to those family carers if they are not well supported—as, in all too many cases, they are not.

**Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** The hon. Lady is making a case for more funds for social care. May I ask how the Labour party would raise that money? Would it give more to local authorities, or would it increase council tax precepts further?

**Barbara Keeley:** Our motion asks for promised funding that is backloaded to 2019-20 to be moved forward. The LGA and ADASS wanted it to be moved last year, and that is what we keep asking for.

**Maria Caulfield:** I thank the hon. Lady for giving way again; she is being extremely generous. Will she tell me, however, whether she is committing her party to delivering that money to local authorities directly, or to allowing them to increase their precepts?

**Barbara Keeley:** We do not even know what the Chancellor is going to do next week. The hon. Lady has invited me to make a declaration today, and it was a nice try, but we did not hear a word from Ministers about their plans during Health questions yesterday. I will, however, make what I think is an important point to the hon. Lady and to any other Member who raises the same issue. Labour would not have put our councils in this position to start with. If the hon. Lady looks back at our spending plans, or looks at the analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies relating to the different parties, she will find that our plans meant that we did not have to make the cuts that her party has made. This Government’s cuts will take £5 billion out of social care. I will send her the link to the IFS analysis if she wants to read it.

**Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab):** My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. The scale of the crisis in some areas is very serious, and it will become even worse following the increase in the minimum wage. Although that increase is welcome, if the local authorities do not have the budgets to cover it, the crisis will be exacerbated.

Is my hon. Friend aware that many providers in both the private and the charitable sectors are returning council contracts? They are saying, “We can no longer make this pay; in fact, we will go bankrupt if we carry on servicing the council.” That is adding to the current problems.

**Barbara Keeley:** My hon. Friend has made a key point. I have already mentioned the fragility of the care market. We shall not be able to explore that fully during my speech, but it is a serious factor. If we do not get the funding right, more and more care providers will simply walk away. At the Unison meeting, members of a Leicestershire rehabilitation team spoke of the problems that they experience when care providers walk away from a contract. When the staff are not there any more, they have to plug the gaps.

**Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab):** The Communities and Local Government Committee is conducting an inquiry into the funding of social care. We have learned that not only are care providers handing contracts back, but councils are terminating contracts because of the inadequacy of the care that is provided. Ultimately, that means that individuals do not receive the care that they should be receiving. Their appointments are cancelled, or there are flying visits from under-trained care workers who are paid less than the minimum wage.

**Barbara Keeley:** My hon. Friend is right, and I shall come to that point shortly.

Carers UK reports that insufficient support from health and social care services is leaving the carers who are doing all that extra work

“isolated, burnt-out and unable to look after their own health.”

The Richmond Group of Charities published the story of Susan. She cares for her husband Bruce, who has been diagnosed with both Parkinson’s and dementia. The struggle that Susan underwent to find quality care

[Barbara Keeley]

is one about which I have been hearing from carers for some time. She was provided with respite care from a care home which was of such low quality that her husband was unrecognisable when she returned for him.

“He hadn’t been shaved, he couldn’t walk, and his eyes were crusty...with blepharitis.”

When Susan managed to get home care for her husband, it was also poor quality. She said:

“They didn’t know what they were doing. It seemed like they’d never cared before. They turned up at five o’clock in the afternoon to put my husband to bed. Or they turned up at ten, once I’d already helped him to bed. Absolutely awful.”

It is also telling how carers like Susan feel when dealing with the challenges of negotiating complex and fragmented care systems. She “felt small” and she said:

“You go in there, and you’ve got no idea about anything, about care. It’s like going in on the first day at school.”

Susan is not a rare case of a carer battling to get respite care or home care of an acceptable quality. Carers UK tell us that three out of 10 carers in its survey have experienced a change in the amount of care and support services that they receive. Six out of 10 of those carers experiencing a change said the amount of care and support received had been reduced.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): The hon. Lady argues for bringing forward funding, and I agree. Does she agree, however, that that is not enough in itself and that all of us on both sides of the House must confront the chronic underfunding of the health and care system, and we need to find ways to raise significantly more resources to ensure we have a modern and efficient health and care system?

**Barbara Keeley:** I agree, and our motion talks about the need for

“a longer-term settlement to ensure that the social care system is sustainable going forward”.

We absolutely do need that.

On quality of care, I was talking about Susan finding a care home and it giving inadequate care. There are too many such care homes. In its 2016 “State of Care” report, the Care Quality Commission said that when it makes a return visit to a service originally rated as “inadequate”, one quarter of those services were not able to improve their ratings. Susan found poor quality home care, and last week the ombudsman reported that the number of complaints about homecare is rising and that the number of complaints upheld by the ombudsman is also rising.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I agree with the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on the need for cross-party working to achieve sustainable funding for both health and social care. As the hon. Lady will know, I have set out my concerns about the underfunding of social care in a letter to the Chancellor. Does she agree that it is not just about funding, however, but also about how we support and train our social care staff? Would she like to see further progress made on the recommendations of Camilla Cavendish about how we train and support our care staff to help to retain them as well as recruit them?

**Barbara Keeley:** I agree, and that is why I started my speech by saying we should value the job our care staff do and we should train them properly; it should be a proper job with a proper career path. The care staff I met today were reduced to worrying about what they were being paid, however, simply because they were paid less than the minimum wage.

This is what six years of funding cuts to social care actually mean for people who need care and their carers: unmet needs for care; patients stuck in hospital, increasingly because they have to wait for a care home or a nursing home place; poor quality care in care homes, with one quarter of “inadequate” services unable to improve; poor quality home care, with more complaints being upheld by the ombudsman; more unpaid family carers having to step in to care; more unpaid family carers having to provide increased levels of care; and, without the right support, those family carers becoming isolated, burnt-out and unable to look after their own health. That is a disturbing deterioration in the state of social care. I want the Secretary of State to tell us whether he recognises the scale and seriousness of the issues I have outlined.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): As chair of the all-party group on Parkinson’s—and motor neurone disease—I have had repeated complaints about the 15-minute calls that local authorities are being forced to introduce because of cuts in their social care allowance. They mean that people are neglected: carers literally run in, and, if the person cannot communicate or has poor mobility, the quality of their care is appalling.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is indeed. There are many examples of that, and we have debated them here many times. The funding crisis is at the base of all this.

I repeat what I said at the start of my speech: social care is in crisis due to a lack of funding. It is notable how many leading doctors, health experts and organisations involved with the NHS are now expressing their concerns and fears about social care and the lack of funding for it. Here are some of those people: Simon Stevens, chief executive of NHS England; Miss Clare Marx, president of the Royal College of Surgeons of England; Professor Dame Sue Bailey, chairwoman of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges; Dr Suzy Lishman, president of the Royal College of Pathologists; Professor Carrie MacEwen, president of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists; Professor Neena Modi, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health; Professor David Oliver, president of the British Geriatrics Society; Dr David Richmond, president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists; Professor Sir Simon Wessely, president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists; Dr Anna Batchelor, dean of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine; Dr Liam Brennan, president of the Royal College of Anaesthetists; and Professor Jane Dacre, president of the Royal College of Physicians. All those people have expressed their fears and concerns about social care and the lack of funding for it.

I should like to add to that list some of the organisations working in the NHS and social care that are now expressing their serious concerns about the funding of social care. They include: the King’s Fund, the Nuffield Trust, the Health Foundation, the Local Government Association, the Association of Directors of Adult

Social Services, the County Councils Network, the BMA, Care England, Unison, Age UK, the Alzheimer's Society, the British Red Cross, Carers UK, Independent Age, United for all Ages, the Learning Disability Coalition, the Motor Neurone Disease Association, and the Care and Support Alliance. Those people and those organisations share a belief that the Government must act now on social care funding, and I urge hon. Members on both sides of the House to support our motion and vote to save social care tonight.

4.41 pm

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from "House" to the end of the Question and add:

"welcomes the Government's Spending Review settlement for health and social care, which ensures that the amount of money available to local authorities for adult social care services will rise significantly across the Parliament, and ensures that up to £3.5 billion more will be available by 2020; commends the work and dedication of those in the social care sector; and further welcomes the introduction by the Government of the social care precept which allows local authorities greater autonomy in making decisions about how they best meet their local communities' needs for social care."

I too want to start by paying tribute all those working in the social care system; there are few jobs that are more important to our society. They work with some of the oldest and most vulnerable people in our society, many of whom have dementia. That is a growing population, with the number of over 90-year-olds having increased by more than a quarter. Life expectancy is up by a whole year since Labour left office. While I would like to claim credit for every Government achievement, that is a demographic change and no thanks to this Government. It also places huge pressure on the system. Every older person is a dad, a mum, a grandparent or a neighbour, and Members on both sides of the House, whatever our disagreements, want them to be treated with the utmost standards of dignity and respect.

**Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab):** There are none so noble as those who care, and they include the Castle Vale carer I met who buys Easter eggs out of her own pocket to give out in her own time to those she cares for. Does the Secretary of State understand the despair being felt by carers who are told that they have only 15 minutes per visit, the despair being felt by those being cared for because they no longer have the contact they once had, or the despair being felt by the family and friends of those who built this country and who now deserve better in the twilight of their years?

**Mr Hunt:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. It is the hallmark of a civilised society that we treat all older citizens with dignity and respect. I totally disapprove of 15-minute visits. I find it impossible to understand how anyone could really look after someone's needs in a 15-minute visit. I hope that, like us, he is proud of the introduction of the national living wage, which is helping the people who do this very important work. It will help 900,000 people working in the social care system by paying all over-25s a minimum hourly rate of £7.20 from this April.

**Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab):** The Secretary of State will know that Ministers have acknowledged that illegal non-payment of the national minimum wage

is rife in the care sector. Does he agree that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs should publish the results of the investigations it launched two years ago into the six big providers? Where employers are found to be non-compliant in relation to an individual care worker, does he agree that HMRC should carry out a full investigation into that employer to see how widespread that non-compliance is?

**Mr Hunt:** We are absolutely determined to clamp down on employers who do not pay the national living wage. If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member has any evidence at all of that happening, they should let HMRC know. HMRC has a policy of naming and shaming employers who do not do the right thing and rightly so.

**Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab) rose—**

**Toby Perkins rose—**

**Mr Hunt:** I will give way to the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) first.

**Wes Streeting:** It is welcome that the minimum wage will increase and that money will hopefully reach the workers we are discussing. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge, however, that the consequence of the increase is that the precept that local authorities charge residents for social care will be eaten up by the wage increase—even in local authorities such as the London Borough of Redbridge, of which I am still an elected member? What will he do to alleviate the very real financial burden on my local authority and others to ensure that everyone gets the quality of care they need?

**Mr Hunt:** I acknowledge the financial impact of the national living wage and will talk about the funding of local authorities.

**Toby Perkins rose—**

**Norman Lamb rose—**

**Mr Hunt:** I will give way once more now and will then try to give way to everyone during the course of my remarks.

**Toby Perkins:** The Secretary of State is being generous in giving way. He started his peroration by talking about the importance of care for the elderly and he is absolutely right about that. Does he agree that we are also talking about caring for people with learning and physical disabilities? The care debate is often entirely about the elderly, but it is much wider than that.

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make that point. I want to talk about Winterbourne View a little later, because this is not just about older people.

**Norman Lamb rose—**

**Mr Hunt:** I will give way shortly, but I want to finish my point about the critical role played by care staff. In total, 1.5 million people work in the social care sector, and I want to mention one group in particular: the 90,000 who come from the EU. They do a brilliant job and we value their contribution to the sector.

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

If the House will forgive me, I want to share one story from early in my time as Health Secretary about an absolutely brilliant manager, who is Polish, of a dementia care home in Swiss Cottage. The people at the home had advanced dementia and many were unable to talk or move, so the atmosphere in the home was challenging to say the least. I asked the lady how she motivated her staff every day, and she said, “If I can get a resident to smile, they won’t remember it the next day, but I do, and I go home with a smile on my face.” The care that was being provided was, to be frank, completely remarkable. This is a moment for all of us to reaffirm what the Prime Minister said today at Prime Minister’s questions: we want these people to remain and we are confident and optimistic that we will be able to get them to remain.

**Andy Burnham** (Leigh) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Hunt:** I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, but I want to give way first to my former ministerial colleague.

**Norman Lamb:** I totally share the sentiment that EU workers are welcome in our country and that we must guarantee their future as soon as possible.

Does the Secretary of State ever feel that he is confronted by a pretty fundamental choice? He can either preside over a system that deteriorates with an increasing number of failures of care, which I know he cares passionately about, or he can be the politician in Government who confronts that, who works with other parties and who comes up with a sustainable long-term solution. It is one or the other. I urge him to take the latter course.

**Mr Hunt:** I absolutely want to be someone in this role who confronts poor care and does everything possible to fight for the highest standards. That is exactly why I am doing this job. Poor care comes in different forms and, yes, funding is an issue. As the health and social care system goes through perhaps its most financially challenging period since the founding of the NHS, I particularly want to ensure that we protect the high standards that the right hon. Gentleman cares about.

**Andy Burnham:** I heard the Secretary of State’s earlier words about EU carers. I am sure that they were genuine, but words are not good enough for them. The longer the Government leave them in limbo, the greater the risk is that they will leave. Our national health service and our care system could not cope with losing all those staff, so what more is he doing? Is he petitioning the Prime Minister for a decision now that will give them leave to stay and properly respects their contribution to our society?

**Mr Hunt:** With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, with whom I have enjoyed many debates in this House, neither he nor I wanted the Brexit vote to happen, but now that it has, we have to cope with a very changed world. The Prime Minister said that she is confident of getting an early agreement. I hope that what we are saying in this House this afternoon will resonate with people and make them understand just how valued they are.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Hunt:** I want to conclude the section about the role of social care staff.

Whatever disagreements we have in this afternoon’s debate, I want the message to go out loud and clear to all social care staff that Members from all parts of the House recognise the work that they do, and that they value it and support them to do that work better. That is part of the definition of a civilised society.

**Helen Whately:** On the point about the need for a long-term sustainable health and social care system, is it not the case that the Secretary of State is driving through work in devolution deals and sustainability and transformation plans, which aim to achieve exactly that—bringing together health and social care to create a much more sustainable system?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Although this afternoon’s debate is about the social care system, the sustainability and transformation plans are a critical part of the long-term solution for financial efficiency and for improving the quality of care.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) on introducing this debate, which is the first Opposition day debate that she has led. I also pay tribute to the fact that she has had a long-standing interest in these issues. She has asked me questions about the social care system on many occasions. She was particularly right to focus on the impact on the NHS, which is real, and on the impact on family carers, which is also real. She talked about Susan and about the impact on people who are finding that they are giving more hours of care than they were planning or are sometimes even able to give. That is something of which we must all be aware. She asked me to answer a direct question: do I recognise the scale and seriousness of the issues faced by the social care system? The answer is, yes, I do. I want to try to address, as comprehensively as I can, some of the substantive issues faced in the social care system.

Let me start by saying that, although today’s debate and the majority of the hon. Lady’s comments were around funding, the issue is not only about funding. The hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) mentioned that social care is not just about older people. In 2011, we had the shock of what was uncovered at Winterbourne View by a BBC “Panorama” programme. We have had a number of examples of horrific abuse at care homes. The Ash Court Care Home case in Kentish Town was one that came to light in 2012. The abuse there was filmed by a relative on a hidden camera. Those issues were primarily not about funding, but about cruelty—a strong word—that we have tolerated in our system. We have had some very significant policy responses since then, which are making a real difference. The first is that this Government, under the coalition, introduced the toughest system of care home inspection in the world.

We often talk in this House about the work of the chief inspector of hospitals, but I wish to pay tribute today to the work done by the chief inspector of adult social care, Andrea Sutcliffe, and her team. She has completed the inspection of nearly 90% of care homes and domiciliary care services. It is encouraging that,

despite the pressures that we have been talking about this afternoon, 72% of the places that she inspected were good or outstanding. More importantly, the 28% that are not are the 28% that we know about and are therefore able to do something about.

I take issue with the way the shadow Health Minister presented her findings. She said that a quarter of the inadequate places were unable to improve following re-inspection. However, the reality is that more than three quarters of places that got an inadequate inspection did improve, which is a huge step forward from where we were a few years ago when we did not know where those places were and when there was no change happening at all.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State is right to highlight the need to improve standards and the need for a rigorous inspection regime, but—taking on board what his former ministerial colleague, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), said—does he accept that even if every single care home in the country reached the appropriate standard, there would still be a care crisis? There is not sufficient funding in the system to make it work. Will he agree to work with all parties to do what we should have done many years ago—before the general election in 2010, as he will recall—and get a grip on the issue and, as a country and as a House, try to sort it out?

**Mr Hunt:** I am more than happy to work with people of all parties to come to a sensible consensus. The one thing that unites all the major parties is a commitment to the NHS and social care system. With respect to the other issues, it is not just about rooting out poor care. It is also about something that the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South mentioned earlier—giving a career structure to people who work in the care system and giving them recognition. That is why in April last year we introduced the care certificate, which is based on achieving 15 standards. It is a voluntary system, but the CQC inspects against it, so there is a strong incentive for care providers to get their staff enrolled for the care certificate. I pay tribute to the work done by Camilla Cavendish, who did a lot of thinking and had a long-standing interest in this issue in her time as a journalist and at No. 10, and on whose proposals we are basing our work in this area.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am grateful that my right hon. Friend has mentioned the CQC and also touched on wages. When I met the south-east director of the CQC, it was clear that there is an issue of staff not being paid properly and then moving around the care home sector for a small amount of extra money, which is vital to them. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the living wage will stop that occurring and result in more people staying in jobs for longer?

**Mr Hunt:** That is a very important point. We have heard suggestions that the Government have been about words, not action, but the national living wage will do an enormous amount to help keep people in jobs for longer and help them to start to think about their jobs as a career, with potential progression into other parts of the health and care system, such as nursing. I commend my hon. Friend for the work that he does on this in Sussex.

**Mr Betts:** The Secretary of State said that the issues in social care were not only about funding, but it seems that funding is the only issue that he does not want to talk about. The Communities and Local Government Committee is taking evidence on social care. We have had evidence from local councils, including Conservative councils, council directors, unions, care providers in the private sector, care receivers, carers, academics and research institutions, all of whom say that there is a funding crisis in social care. Does the Secretary of State think he might just be wrong in being the only person to deny that such a funding crisis exists?

**Mr Hunt:** With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, I was coming on to talk about funding. I just wanted to make the point that the issue is not just about funding.

I respectfully disagree with some of the suggestions made by the shadow Health Minister in her comments earlier that this is essentially about party political choices, for the simple reason that at the last election, Labour promised less for social care and would have spent less than we are spending. I gently remind Opposition Members that Ed Balls as shadow Chancellor was absolutely explicit in 2015. He said that he would not reverse funding cuts to local government—indeed, he would have made further cuts. Under this Government, those cuts have started to be reversed. Spending on adult social care increased—[*Interruption.*] These are the facts. Spending on adult social care increased by around £600 million in the first year of the Parliament and is set to increase further because of the spending review, which will mean that up to an additional £3.5 billion can be spent during this Parliament.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): I am afraid the Secretary of State is living in cloud cuckoo land. My council has to make £55 million of cuts on top of the £100 million it has already made. There is a funding crisis, and we will not solve it unless he admits there is a crisis. He cannot continue to be in denial, and we cannot have a Prime Minister who constantly says that the NHS and social care have the funding they need. We need cross-party agreement on this long-term issue, but, first, he has to acknowledge that there is a problem.

**Mr Hunt:** I have great respect for the hon. Lady, but Leicester Council actually increased its adult social care budget by 7%. Overall, there was an increase in the adult social care budget last year, and that was made possible by the new social care precept, which is being used by 144 out of 152 councils. That will raise £382 million this year and up to £2 billion a year by 2019-20.

**Liz Kendall:** My council has had to cut other vital local services to fulfil its statutory obligations. The social care precept will not even pay for the increase in the minimum wage—the council is going to have to move money from elsewhere. The Secretary of State is living in denial. You cannot solve a problem unless you admit there is one. People are willing to work across the House to deliver a long-term solution, but he has to admit that there is a problem.

**Mr Hunt:** With the greatest respect, I do not know whether the hon. Lady heard what I said just a few moments ago, but I answered very directly what the shadow Health Minister said. Do I recognise the scale

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

and seriousness of the issues? Yes, I do, and I am coming on to explain what I think the solutions are. The point I am making is, yes, the budget—the amount spent on social care—was cut in the last Parliament, as a result of the very difficult economic situation we faced after the financial crisis in 2008, but it is starting to go up again in this Parliament. We need to look at what we can do to try to turn that into a sustainable improvement in the care received by all of our constituents.

A crucial point was missing from the shadow Health Minister's opening speech. There was a suggestion that the issues in social care are essentially caused entirely by decisions made by central Government. We need to salute the efforts made by councils of all colours to deal with the pressures in social care, because those are very tough. Middlesbrough Council, for example, increased its social care budget by 11%—it is the most improved council in England. My own council, Surrey, which is in an affluent area, but which has a large number of elderly people to look after, has battled enormous odds to expand provision.

However, the fact is that there is enormous variation in the way local authorities have responded to these challenges. If we look at the impact on the NHS, and at the delayed transfers of care that are attributable to social care, we can see that the best councils, such as Peterborough, Rutland, Newcastle and Torbay, have virtually no delays in hospital discharges attributable to social care. That can be compared with Birmingham, Manchester, Reading and Southampton where there are between 14 and 21 days of delayed transfers attributable to social care per 10,000 of population every working day. That is a difference of 20 times between the best and the worst councils, and we cannot say that there is a 20-times difference in funding between the best and the worst councils.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Members have alluded to the fact that local authority budgets are under the hammer at the moment. More importantly—I have raised this with the Secretary of State before—one of the big problems is having the social workers to get people a care package when they leave hospital to go home, and that creates bed blocking, so we are in a vicious circle. The last Labour Government looked at an offer from the then Conservative Opposition to get together and have a properly funded national care service. Why have we not looked at that?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the presence of social workers in hospitals is vital in discharging people, but I think he will be quite shocked to know that 50% of all the delayed transfers of care in the entire NHS happen in just 20 local authority areas. There are many places that are doing these things well, even in the current challenging financial circumstances, but there are others that, frankly, could do a lot better.

Overall, what we see is a picture where the best councils have expanded funding and provision. For example, last year, Windsor and Maidenhead increased its spend by 6.4%, and the number of people accessing long-term care is up by 8%. That was a Conservative council, but the Labour council in Doncaster also chose

to increase its social care budget by 10%—nearly £8 million—and it is looking after nearly 7% more people.

This is not just about funding; it is also about the speed of health and social care integration and about local leadership. Where such leadership exists, important changes are happening even now. For example, in Cheshire East, dedicated workers are supporting people with early-stage dementia, saving more than £4,000 a year per client in social care costs while improving the service for patients. Milton Keynes is another good example: its innovative pilots have cut delayed days attributable to social care by nearly three quarters.

Others, regrettably, have chosen to cut funding and provision. There are many reasons for that, but the one thing that is difficult to explain to the public is why, at times of such challenge, local authority reserves have increased by nearly £10 billion since 2010. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South made a fair point when she said that there has never been greater financial or operational pressure on all councils. Like the NHS, there is huge pressure, but unlike the NHS, it has not been possible to protect their budget since 2010.

What is the way forward in this very difficult situation? I think that it is a combination of the right financial decisions locally and recognition by local authorities and the NHS that they are part of the same team. That is why, as has been said, the sustainability and transformation plan process is so important.

It is easy to knock a process whereby local areas come together to have yet more meetings, which we are pretty good at doing in the NHS and social care system, and it is also easy to characterise those meetings as secret, but the fact is that people do not want to publish their plans until they are ready, and they will all be published by the end of this year. Many Members on both sides of the House criticised the Health and Social Care Act 2012 because they felt that it did not do enough to promote integrated care, but now we have a process to do that. That is massively important for the social care system, as this is the first time that local authorities are properly involved in NHS planning. Indeed, four of the STPs—namely those for Greater Manchester, Norfolk and Waveney, Nottinghamshire, and Birmingham and Solihull—are headed by local authority leads. On Monday, the head of operations at NHS England told me that there was not one STP meeting that he had been to where a local council was not represented. At the moment, it is a planning process and it needs to be delivered, but planning needs to happen collaboratively. It is a significant change for the NHS and social care system, but it is finally happening.

**Robert Ffello:** So why is it that Stoke-on-Trent City Council tells me that no council officers or councillors have been involved in the Staffordshire STP? Given that it covers the whole of Staffordshire, the more deprived areas of Stoke-on-Trent and north Staffordshire will, in effect, subsidise south Staffordshire, because it has greater debts. Why cannot MPs have input into the plan? It is absolutely disgraceful.

**Mr Hunt:** Everyone will have input into the plan, but the hon. Gentleman might want to ask his council why it is complaining about pressures on the social care system when it has refused to use the social care precept

and raise extra money, which could be desperately used for social care. That would make a real difference to his constituents.

Where councils and local NHS organisations are working together, we are seeing some real financial savings that are having a big impact. For example, Northumberland has saved £5 million through integrated services with Northumbria NHS Trust, and there has been a 12% reduction in demand for residential care as a result. In Oxfordshire, where the local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and trusts are all working together, discharge delays are down 40% in six months, and those due to social care have more than halved.

**Karin Smyth:** We are having an interesting tour of various councils around the country. I referred earlier to the fact that people have been let down after the 2015 Conservative manifesto, which promised them that they would be secure in their own homes. The proposal to that effect in the Care Act 2014 was postponed because so many councils put pressure on the Government to delay. The Public Accounts Committee has been told that the proposal will be introduced in April 2020. What work is happening in the Department to ensure that that proposal will come forward so that people will be secure in their own homes?

**Mr Hunt:** We are doing work, and I would simply say that we have also delivered on that promise because we have introduced the deferred payment scheme, which means that no one will need to sell their home because of social care costs.

I will wind up now, because I know that many hon. Members want to speak. When we have local authorities and the NHS working together, what is our objective from that process? We want a seamless transition for patients between the health and social care system. We want shared electronic health records so that patients are not asked the same questions time after time. We want a single assessment system so that people are not assessed twice by different organisations trying to get different results. We want to see the pooling of budgets, we want to get rid of delayed transfers of care, and we want multidisciplinary teams. Most importantly, we want there to be a single plan for every vulnerable person, to which everyone who is involved in their care adheres. Those are the objectives.

In the face of enormous pressure, the best solution for local authorities and local NHS organisations that are finding things challenging right now is not to slow down those vital changes, but to accelerate the pace of change, so that we eliminate waste and improve patient care at the same time. Councils that do so will have the full support of the Government. I urge the House to support the Government's amendment.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Before I call the next speaker, I will have to impose a seven-minute limit. I have to warn Members that the more interventions that are taken, the more that limit will have to come down.

5.11 pm

**Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley)—my good friend—on an excellent speech. She

has no equal in this House as a champion for older people and their carers. Her speech, unlike the speech by the Secretary of State, was firmly rooted in the real world.

This is the century of the ageing society. Caring for people as they live longer lives is the greatest public policy challenge of our times, but for years Parliament has shown itself to be unequal to that challenge. I want to speak today to tell the story of the efforts to reform social care over the last decade, because I want the facts to be on the record, so that people can understand what happened and vow to do better. The story explains the mess we are in today. To be honest, it is quite a shocking story of partisan point-scoring and, worse, political cowardice, which have seriously failed millions of older and disabled people.

The story started nine years ago at the spending review in 2007. I was Chief Secretary to the Treasury at the time, and at the insistence of the Treasury I gave the Department of Health the condition on its spending review settlement that it would conduct a root and branch review of the funding of social care. There was a recognition, even in the Treasury, that if we allowed the situation to continue, it could, in the end, damage the national health service. Quite clearly, the funding was not sustainable, and if social care was left to collapse, it would drag down the NHS with it.

The urgency of such action had been recognised almost a decade earlier, in 1999, when a report by a royal commission on the matter recommended free personal care, paid for by general taxation. It did so for the reason that if we pay for free preventive care in people's homes, those people do not end up in hospital and costing us all more. Nothing was done, and by 2007 the need for reform was urgent. So between 2007 and 2009, a huge amount of detailed modelling work was done and options were looked at.

When I arrived in the post of Health Secretary in 2009, the work had come to a head. The analysis supported a clear conclusion that radical reform, rather than patching up, was needed. Department of Health officials supported the Treasury analysis that there would be risks to the NHS if social care was allowed to decline. A Green Paper was published in July 2009, and the idea of a national care service was first put forward. The thinking was that only by bringing the systems together, with a system of clear national entitlement, would we be able properly to move towards integration. The maintenance of two entirely differently funded systems—one free at the point of use and the other means-tested and charged for—would mean that they would never be able to speak the same language and there would always be barriers to integration.

I was ready to grasp the nettle, because it was clear to me that the NHS was facing a decade of lower funding from 2010 and 2020, and that one of the ways it could cope with that was with the efficiencies we could unlock through properly and fully integrating health and social care and by moving from a hospital-based medical model to a person-centred social model of care starting in the home.

This is where things went wrong. Picking up that I was ready to up the momentum for reform, the then shadow Health Secretary, Andrew Lansley, approached me in Portcullis House just before Christmas 2009 and asked me for cross-party talks. I thought about it, but I agreed. I thought, as my hon. Friend the Member for

[*Andy Burnham*]

Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) has suggested, that we should take the issue out of party politics, which would be better for everybody. We had a couple of meetings, in which we went round the issues. I favoured the more ambitious, comprehensive reform of paying for social care on the NHS principle—that everybody contributes, but everybody is covered for their care needs and has peace of mind in later life. Andrew Lansley wanted a more voluntary system, in which the insurance market would come up with solutions. That was where we left it.

Then a bombshell was dropped in February 2010: the poster saying, “Now Gordon wants £20,000 when you die.” I very vividly remember the day when it landed. I was told that Andy Coulson had put pressure on Andrew Lansley to do it, and that he did not really want to, but felt he could not say no. I do not know whether that is true, but I know that the Conservatives, who asked me for cross-party talks, betrayed the confidence that I gave, and they have never seen fit to apologise for that. The point is not about the personal political damage that that did, but about the chilling effect the poster had on the social care debate. It instantly killed any talk of radical reform, and it actually had a deadening effect for the rest of the following Parliament—the last Parliament—during which no real progress was made.

That brings me to what happened after the election, when, as shadow Health Secretary, I challenged the Government from the Opposition Front Bench about the poster that they had put out during the election saying that they would cut the deficit, not the NHS. I made the point that if they did so, they would in effect cut social care: if they prioritised NHS spending within the reduced envelope, that would have devastating consequences for social care and would in the end come back to affect the NHS.

From the Dispatch Box at every Prime Minister’s Question Time, the then Prime Minister used to quote me as claiming that it would be irresponsible to give the NHS real-terms increases, but he never commented on the second part of what I had said, which was that it was irresponsible to do so if we were cutting social care. I did say that, and it was irresponsible to social care in the way they did to pay for their commitment to the NHS. Social care was cut by 9% during the last Parliament, with 400,000 vulnerable people losing support in their homes. Those people ended up in A&E or trapped in hospital beds, piling pressure on the hospital system.

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman—this may be my last chance to do so—for the work he has done as a Member and wish him well in his future career if he is successful in his election. Does he agree that the chilling effect of the outcome of those conversations before the election and perhaps the betrayal of his confidence, as he puts it, is that there could no longer be a rational conversation about properly funding the health and care system through any form of taxation? That is the problem that has emerged, and perhaps the best way to fix it is through general taxation.

**Andy Burnham:** I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and the spirit in which he made it. He is absolutely right: that set everything back and

meant that there was no possibility of a cross-party approach. There will have to be such an approach if we are to fix social care and, indeed, to give the NHS what it needs, because they will both need more funding during this Parliament. That is the real shame. I did not make my point about Andrew Lansley for political reasons; I just want people to understand what happened, so that the current generations of politicians might do something different.

The answers we have since had from the Government are wholly inadequate. We have heard today that the precept does not raise enough money, particularly for poorer councils. It is no answer; in fact, it just cynically devolves the responsibility for the whole issue to local government, even though councils did not create the problem. I still favour an all-in system. I will say it: I favour a system in which we ask older people to pay a set contribution, so that they have peace of mind in later life, with all their care costs covered.

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** I am listening very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. In the spirit of wanting to rise above party politics, will he agree that it was totally wrong of him to suggest at any stage in the last Parliament that the Government wanted to privatise the NHS, when we have never had the intention to do so? It was wholly irresponsible to scare the public about that.

**Andy Burnham:** In a week when Virgin Care is taking on a huge community care contract, I do not think the Secretary of State should be making that point—particularly the Secretary of State who privatised ambulance services in Greater Manchester. I honestly do not think we need to go there.

The point that I am making is about funding social care. The Conservatives claimed that we were introducing a new inheritance tax. Do people not understand that just 3.4% of estates in this country attract inheritance tax? Why is that? Because the vast majority of estates are whittled down by the costs of care—tens of thousands of pounds, or hundreds of thousands of pounds for some people. That is not fair and it is not sustainable. We must be able to do better.

I feel so strongly about this because I saw my grandmother go through the care system in England 20 years ago and, frankly, it was nowhere near good enough. I arrived here saying that I would do something about it. I tried to do something about it, but we have not got anywhere near a solution to the scale of the challenge. People will need to put party politics aside and find common ground. The point scoring and failure to grasp big issues have led to a situation where people have low regard for this place.

We are left with a malnourished, privatised care system in England that is sinking lower as we speak. A culture of slap-dash 15-minute visits is entrenched, in which staff do not get properly treated, trained or respected. Standards in care homes have slipped even further, and stories of neglect and abuse abound—we hear them all the time. Countless vulnerable people and their families still have to pay these cruel dementia taxes, which have risen under this Government, losing everything they have worked for and going into later life with everything on the roulette table: home, pension, savings—the lot. That is not the care system we should

have in 2016 in this country. At what point are we going to say, "Enough is enough," and actually do something about it?

5.21 pm

**Alistair Burt** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I cannot promise anything as dramatic as what we have just heard from the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who speaks with great authority and knowledge. I follow three fascinating speeches. He was correct that no one knows more about care and older people than the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), who speaks for the Opposition. She always speaks in her quiet but incredibly knowledgeable way and puts a strong case. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out the challenge that he faced on coming to office and in dealing with many of the issues outlined by the right hon. Member for Leigh.

The narrow nature of an Opposition day debate does not allow us to go into all the issues that have been raised between the three of them, but the truth is that we will need to do something different in due course to deal with adult social care. These issues have not been tackled as well as they could have been in the past. Everyone has had a go, but everyone draws back at a certain stage. The ageing population means that we cannot continue to do that.

There are two straws in the wind that the House should be conscious of. The first is the integration processes that I was asked to start delivering when I came to office. There was a determination from the former Chancellor and the Secretary of State to make sure that integration actually happened, to deal with the issues that have been outlined today. There is a determination right the way through the process to deliver that at last, instead of just talking about it—we have passed that stage.

The second is devolution in areas such as Greater Manchester, which will give the right hon. Member for Leigh the perfect opportunity to put into practice exactly what he has been talking about, along with the skilled and experienced director, Jon Rouse, who has moved from the Department of Health. No one knows more about it than he does. That provides the perfect opportunity to deliver on what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying.

I should declare an interest not only as a former Minister, but as the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on carers. In the few brief minutes allotted to me, I want to take the opportunity to thank carers for what they do and speak about how this issue impacts on them. It is obvious that the difficulties of provision elsewhere impact very much on the 6 million carers in the United Kingdom, who provide largely unpaid services to care for their loved ones and who do an exceptional job.

I am very pleased to have kicked off a review of the carer's strategy, which is working its way through the system. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), will deliver that review in due course, and I am very interested to hear what will be said.

To give some background on finances for a moment, the financial situation is very difficult. I want to support my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the Lobby tonight because I know how hard he tried in the

financial settlement of 2015 and the extent to which he succeeded. I will mention two things. First, he got an increased amount into social care. Secondly, in recognising that more money was needed and introducing the social precept, the former Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne), crossed quite an important barrier. No longer would the Government's position be that there was enough money in the system; allowing local authorities to raise more money was a recognition that more money was indeed necessary. The nature of the settlement means that the early years are difficult, but more money will be going in in due course. The situation is exceptionally difficult. No former Minister or Member of Parliament would say that things are not incredibly stretched—they are—but I know how hard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State fought to get that money coming through.

The key point my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made, which is desperately relevant, is this business of variation in practice. I was constantly concerned about how it could be that, at a time when it has never been easier to transfer knowledge from one area to another, two neighbouring areas could have radically different processes that meant one area had more difficulties than the other and the best practice in one area delivered better results. Until there is the sense that best practice can be followed everywhere, we will not get the changes we need—my right hon. Friend highlighted some of those. We see the same thing in terms of delivery of the Care Act 2014 and in relation to work on the better care fund.

As for areas where things will continue to improve, I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend said what he did about Andrea Sutcliffe and the Care Quality Commission in relation to care homes. It is very important that the work continues to identify bad practice and to deal with what I call a tolerance of standards of care in some places that would not be accepted in acute hospitals but are sort of tolerated in care and in mental health. It is very important to address that, so that there is no longer such a difference.

I want to put on the record some areas of concern. Yes, things are increasingly stretched. I want to raise the employment issues there are for carers. We have spent a lot of time and effort on looking at childcare and the ability of people to cope with their childcare responsibilities. We now need to look at those caring for people who may be older, and who are older themselves. I hope that an important part of the review that is coming forward will look at what employers can do to make things easier for carers.

I want to emphasise the dark corners that exist. There have been complaints to the ombudsman because people are afraid of making complaints about the care of their family members due to the fear of reprisals. That simply should not happen, and it is right that we are alert to it. I thank groups such as Your Voice Matters for their work; Jenny Moore from that group came to me with her concerns. Sometimes pressure groups can be an irritant—they are the stone in the shoe that makes the difference. I make a plea to them and others to work together to bring their concerns forward. People should not feel that they face reprisals for raising complaints. That is extremely important.

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** Just before my right hon. Friend wraps up, I want to put on the record my thanks to him for his outstanding work in my Department, both in mental health and in social care, and for his real commitment to the voluntary organisations and the patients and service users in those areas.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Alistair Burt:** I am extremely grateful to my right hon. Friend and to other colleagues. I loved and enjoyed the job. There is much more good work still to be done. I saw good examples everywhere. The concern we all share is how to make the examples of the best the quality of everywhere. There is no reason why that should not be the case.

In the extra minute I now have—I thank my right hon. Friend for his kindness there—I will look ahead. The things that will continue to make a difference include, first, more co-ordinated working and, secondly, new technology. We must look at how technology can be used, including remote monitoring and different ways of providing care, both in homes and for care workers. Increasingly, technology will make a difference.

Thirdly, on environments for living, there will be more retirement communities, more people will live together, and there will be a greater consideration of independence and self-care. I should always mention the work of Men in Sheds to combat loneliness and isolation, as they need more recognition.

Is there a need for more money? I encourage my right hon. Friend to continue what he started with the settlement process, for which he fought very hard. The whole Department needs to be behind the Secretary of State as he continues to make the arguments, because life for some is just too stretched. A combination of the right quality of care and the right amount of money will make a considerable difference.

5.30 pm

**Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab):** I am afraid it was the same old story from the Secretary of State: no response to the funding crisis. It is a national crisis and a national disgrace that social care is not being funded properly.

The social care system should of course become more efficient, but much work by local authorities and local health providers to make it more efficient and bring about improvements has already taken place. The simple fact, however, is that there is just not enough money. My local authority, Halton Borough Council, works closely with local NHS providers, but it has suffered a 50% cut in its budget, so how can it be expected to sustain and grow support for adult social care?

In the time I have, I want to quote parts the Care Quality Commission “State of Care” report of 13 October. It states that demands are increasing on health and social care, but that

“despite increasingly challenging circumstances, much good care is being delivered”.

We know that, but it goes on to say:

“However, the sustainability of this position is in doubt...The financial challenges in the NHS have been extensively documented...there has been evidence of a deterioration in quality...and some providers...are struggling to improve their rating beyond ‘requires improvement’.”

By the end of 2015-16, NHS providers had overspent their budgets by £2.4 billion. Local authorities were reported to have overspent by £168 million. Delivering high quality care while achieving good financial management is therefore more important and more challenging than ever before.

The fragility of the adult social care market and the pressure on primary care services are now beginning to impact both on the people who rely on these services and on the performance of secondary care. The evidence suggests we may be approaching a tipping point. Profit margins are reducing because of pressures on fees and cost pressures that include the national living wage. Some providers are already starting to hand back home care contracts as undeliverable. Local authorities predict more of that to come.

The Treasury allowed local authorities to raise an additional 2% above the existing threshold, but this amounts to only £790,000 in 2016 for Halton Borough Council. That is well short of meeting the increased cost of adult social care. In addition to the costs, the council is facing its sixth year of austerity measures and has to find a further £30.3 million by 2020. Adult social care has delivered £17.4 million in savings from 2011 to 2017, but this level of savings is no longer sustainable given the pressures on the service. That pressure is compounded by increasing demand and financial constraints from health services, which can have a direct impact on social care services. Halton has to find an additional £2.9 million, while the additional precept it has received amounts to only £790,000. The council tells me that the adult social care and funding reform allocations in the Care Act 2014, which moved into the settlement funding assessment, are insufficient to meet the requirements of part 1 of the Act.

The national living wage is the greatest financial pressure at present facing adult social care, and the Government are not funding it. The ageing population of Halton is increasing, and that is part of a general change in demographics. The number of residents aged 65-plus will increase by 43% by 2037. Care providers, on the other hand, are exerting pressure on the council for increases in rates over and above inflation. The expectation appears to be that local authorities should fully fund the additional costs. I pay tribute to our care workers, who work under great pressure with a greater workload and fewer staff. Things do go wrong from time to time and they have to be addressed, but the care workers do a fine job. I was struck by the findings in the Unison “Care in Crisis” report. In answer to the question, “Have budget cuts affected your work or workplace?”, 70% said there was a greater workload and over 60% said there were fewer staff.

I have been in touch with my local hospitals, too. Warrington and Halton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust says it is currently engaged in the challenge of trying to achieve the 4-hour A&E target, as well as an improvement programme. As part of that, an independent audit was recently carried out under the emergency care improvement programme. On the Warrington site, it reviewed 241 patients across 15 in-patient wards where the length of stay was longer than six days.

The feedback received was that 58%, or 140, of the 241 patients reviewed were deemed medically fit—in other words, did not require a bed in an acute hospital. Of these, 91 required the intervention of an agency

external to the hospital, such as local authority, social care or community care providers. The top three delays identified were: waiting for external agency assessments; waiting for a community hospital placement or other bedded intermediate care; and waiting for the start of social domiciliary care packages. The hospital of course acknowledges the difficulties that local authorities and commissioning bodies face around social care.

On the subject of Warrington hospital, the Minister will be interested to know that I asked the chief executive of Halton CCG whether, as part of the STP programme, consideration had been given to reducing the opening hours of Warrington A&E, but he refused to answer the question and gives no reason for that. I hope that the Minister will look into the matter and ensure that I get the information I should be entitled to.

The Government cannot go on ignoring the fact that there is not enough money. We heard the Secretary of State again today ignore this fact. He spent most of his speech not talking about the crucial point, which is funding, and that is clearly the feedback from all parts of the service. The CQC says that the system is fragile and at a tipping point. This is not Labour MPs or Labour councils; this is the CQC. I ask the Minister to tell the Secretary of State that he and the Chancellor need to come forward with a proper plan for funding social care. If they do not, the crisis will continue and deepen, and the Government will be responsible.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The limit on Back-Bench speeches has now to be reduced, with immediate effect, to six minutes.

5.36 pm

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): A while ago, I spent a week in intensive care—not, I assure you, as a patient—and I remember well how the unit was unable to admit a seriously sick patient because there were no beds free, and there were no beds free in the intensive care unit because there were none free in the hospital. The ward sister told me that that was because patients, particularly elderly patients, could not be discharged because there were no care home places for them. She described that as bed blocking. That is a familiar story, particularly to hon. Members in the Chamber, but I should tell the House that that was 20 years ago. Delayed transfers of care, as we now call them, are nothing new.

The fact that this is nothing new is a reminder that the problem will not be easily solved; there are no easy answers, but that is not to say that we should not try. In fact, I believe that we should and must try. We must address the problem of delayed transfers of care, not only because NHS hospitals need to use their beds for acutely sick people who need acute hospital care, but because hospital is a very bad place for patients to be, particularly older patients, if they are ready to go home. It is absolutely the worst place for older patients, when they could be at home regaining their mobility, as opposed to losing it stuck in a hospital bed. A few weeks confined to a bed in an acute hospital can mean that an older person never walks again, even though they went in perfectly able to walk and live independently. I say that from the experience of my own grandmother.

I appreciate the efforts being made across the system to solve this problem. I know that hospitals and the social care system across the country are working together to speed up discharges; to put in place packages of care; to identify who needs single-handed versus double-handed care; and to try to make best use of limited resources. I know that that work is being done in Kent in my constituency. A few months ago, I convened a meeting between East Kent NHS hospital and Kent County Council specifically to talk about what they were doing to reduce the number of delayed transfers of care. I should give Kent some credit, as this year the number has fallen significantly: it approximately halved between last June and this June, so it really is possible to make progress, even in a tight financial situation.

At the regional level, the STPs, the devolution deals in places such as Greater Manchester, emerging accountable care organisations and vanguards such as Encompass in east Kent are really working on how to bring health and social care together and how to improve the situation with delayed transfers of care. They must prioritise this and they have to go beyond questions of whose budget the money comes from, whose money it is, whose problem it is and whose patient it is. Instead, they need to look at the problem as a whole and take account of the patient as an individual. They should simply look at what care the patient needs, not whether it is part of one system or another. I would like to thank all those working on this across the country for their efforts. They are working not just to free up much needed beds, but for the sake of individual patients who need better care outside hospital.

That brings me to the question of money. As a society, we face the challenge of people living longer, needing more care and rightly expecting better care. Thanks to the work of the CQC inspecting care homes and care providers, we are seeing some transparency in the quality of care, and we are identifying where there is poor care. Thankfully, the vast majority—70% or so—of care providers are either good or outstanding, but a significant minority is not good enough. It is good to see, though, that the majority of those are, in turn, improving.

I welcome the improvements to care, driven in part by the CQC and greater transparency, but we cannot get away from the need for more money in the system. We all know that the Government have recognised that. Despite the large deficit and debt left by the Labour party in 2010, the Government have even so committed to funding the NHS through the five year forward view and to increasing funding to social care. Social care funding is rising in real terms. I enormously welcome the social care precept—the extra 2% that Kent and other councils are levying to increase the funding for social care. I have not heard a single person in my area complain about that levy, that increase in the amount of council tax that has to be paid, which I think shows widespread support for funding more care.

It is good to spend money where we can on social care as well maintain the commitment to funding the NHS, but there is a case for work to be done so that we know what any extra money spent on social care will achieve. To what extent might it achieve savings for the NHS? When I asked the experts questions in this area, I encountered a lot of vagueness about what could be achieved for the NHS by increased spending on social care.

[Helen Whately]

Finally, I emphasise the importance of having a system that truly joins up health and social care, so that each pound is spent most effectively across both those areas and so that each person gets the right care for them. It should not depend on whether they are in the NHS or social services spheres; it should be the right care for every individual person.

5.43 pm

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): They say that growing up is optional, but growing old is inevitable. Our social care system is on its knees and, regardless of what has been said today, lack of funding is the cause.

I invite you to picture this, Mr Speaker. You are sitting in your living room, unable to read or watch the TV as your sight is failing; you are unable to stand or go to the bathroom because your mobility has failed; and you are unable to delve into your deepest, happiest memories because your cognition has failed. This is the reality for millions and millions of people in this country. This is what they live with, day in, day out. They may be lucky to have family members who can help, or they may be reliant on the kindness of strangers to help them with basic everyday things such as washing, going to the bathroom, eating—things that you and I, Mr Speaker, may take for granted in our younger years.

Many councils, including Wandsworth Council, have removed vast amounts of money from their adult social care budgets. The most vulnerable in our society need safety, not insecurity. We need to ensure that robust systems are in place to provide the care for people, many of whom might have fought so that we can have the liberty that we enjoy today. We do not need an unretainable workforce or the reduction of funds year on year.

The vast cuts and insecurities do not merely amount to cancelling a bus to the seaside for a day, or cancelling over-80s bingo; real, core care treatments are being cut. They are being cut to the bone. This is happening to many people who have given the country so much in their lifetimes. They have paid their taxes, they have worked hard and they have raised their children, yet all that the Government can do at the moment is leave them high and dry. I say that that is not good enough: they deserve more.

What about the personal carers who leave their jobs because they do not want to leave their families to the will of local provision? There are 19,000 people caring for family members in Wandsworth alone, and they have to choose between heating and eating every winter just to make ends meet. We are failing those people.

The people who work in our care system dedicate their lives to working in social care, and they work very hard. I want to put on record my personal thanks and admiration for the work that they do day in, day out. It is not easy for them to leave their own families and work so selflessly and for such long hours to help others. They do so in the hope that they can provide even just a small amount of support and can put a smile on someone's face, as the Secretary of State said earlier. He has now left the Chamber, so he will not hear my peroration. Anyway, it is great to be able to make someone smile, just for a day.

The current provision in Wandsworth, however, is the “most economically advantageous”, which is a euphemism for “cheapest”. Our country deserves better. It may be said that we are providing high quality cheap care, but in many cases we are not, certainly in Wandsworth. Both the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) spoke about CQC inspections and high ratings. That is great, but Wandsworth council is having to contract out to agencies whose CQC ratings describe them as “requiring improvement”. Let me ask Members this, if they will look up from their phones for a moment. Would that be good enough for their families? Would it be good enough for my family? I think not. I think that all the families in the United Kingdom deserve care from people who do not “require improvement” but are delivering the best possible care, because they deserve nothing less.

In Tooting, I have heard reports of patients sitting in their homes waiting for the knock on the door from a carer who has not shown up. Day after day, I hear of family members having to hide in their cars just to prove to the council that the carers are not showing up, because the carers are saying, “Unfortunately, your dad has dementia. He did not remember that we came.” That is not good enough. It is not good enough for our families. This is a cross-party issue. I implore the Government: please listen to what I am saying, and do the right thing.

I spent 11 years working in the NHS, in A & E, on the front line. Our staff at St George's hospital in Tooting worked incredibly hard, but NHS staff throughout the UK also work hard. Day after day, I saw families in crisis. They brought their elderly family members to the door, crying, saying, “I cannot cope: I do not know what to do any more.” Such people are treated by our wonderful NHS staff, but, as we have already heard, that causes bed-blocking, because there is no adequate social care provision that would allow them to leave hospital.

The Government are allowing contracts to be awarded to companies that do not pay the living wage. It is fantastic that the living wage is going to go up, but how are staff to be retained and provide the high quality care that they so wish to deliver if there is not the budget to pay for it?

As I said earlier, I spent 11 years on the NHS front line. Now I am in the House of Commons, and I am flying the flag for every single carer, every single NHS worker and every single patient. I am flying the flag for every single person in the United Kingdom who deserves better for their loved ones: for your parents, for my parents, for absolutely everyone. Not investing in social care leads to avoidable mistakes. Not investing in social care leads to more pressures on our already pressurised NHS. Not investing in social care costs lives and dignity.

How much more time do the Government need to recognise that not addressing the current funding crisis in social care is severely affecting lives and crippling our public services? Respectfully, I call on them to wake up and do the right thing.

5.49 pm

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): I shall not be supporting the motion. While I agree that there are pressures on social care, the answer is not just financial. As many

Members have pointed out, notably my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), we need to change the system and combine health and social care.

I have worked in the NHS for more than 20 years, and I still work as a nurse. I have always found it odd that health and social care are delivered separately, funded separately, and seen as separate entities. When I trained over 20 years ago, we were taught to treat people as a whole, not to treat them in terms of their social care needs or their health needs. I have spent most of my time working as a nurse in a hospital, and it is very different there. If someone needs personal care—if they need washing or feeding—we just get on and do it because we are looking after that patient as a whole. When patients are discharged home, they get their healthcare needs and medication delivered by the NHS, but if they need feeding, washing or dressing, they have to wait sometimes for many hours for someone else to provide that separately. I find that increasingly difficult to see.

Healthcare and personal care in hospitals is delivered by trained nurses and healthcare assistants who have had much training and are very well respected and valued. Personal care, however, is often delivered by people who are paid less than the living wage and who very often have had little or no training. Is it any wonder that this goes wrong, and that people are readmitted into hospital after ending up at home with healthcare problems? It is no wonder at all that we are facing this issue, and that is because the system is not working, not necessarily because there is not enough finance.

We need to appreciate the skill involved in social—or what I call personal—care. Washing someone is not just washing someone; if a person's health needs are being looked after properly by a highly trained nurse who washes them, they will be checking whether they have eaten and taken their medication, and whether they are a little more confused today, and if so, why? Is a urinary tract infection brewing? Are their opiates too much? Are they hypoxic or constipated? There might be a whole host of reasons, and that nurse gets on top of those things and keeps that person well. Without that knowledge and skill, delivering social care on the cheap is never going to work.

We have seen hard evidence of this today from a pan-European study that says that the risk of a patient dying in hospital increases by a fifth for every nurse replaced by a healthcare assistant. I am sure if that study were extended to social care and into the community, those figures would be even worse. There has been an historical undervaluing of social care, which has been the Cinderella service in the care sector. I believe we should stop referring to healthcare and social care and just call it care.

The answer is not just to throw more money at the problem. I agree that money is needed, but the answer is to combine both things: health and social care need to be jointly commissioned, jointly paid for and jointly delivered. Currently, social care does not work for patients. They often have multiple visits—four or five visits in a day by four or five different people, with one person who can give them their medication but is not allowed to wash them, and the next person who has to say, even if they need medication, “Sorry that's not my job. You'll have to wait for your next visit.”

We heard from a previous Labour Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), that attempts have been made to join health and social care together, but these have not made progress. I congratulate the Government on bringing forward sustainability and transformation plans and the better care fund in an attempt to make that difficult transition to merging health and social care. We are hearing about the progress that is being made, and the Secretary of State said that in places where this is starting to work admissions are dropping by 40%, which is welcome.

I passionately believe health and social care need to be combined. That will improve outcomes and reduce spending and admissions, but most of all it will improve patient care. The only way forward now is to be bold and brave, and when we have groups such as the King's Fund with its Time to Think Differently programme recommending this as a new model of care, we have to move swiftly.

I cannot support this motion. While I believe that social care is under huge pressure, finance is not the only answer; we need a combined service, and we need to free up healthcare professionals to look after their patients holistically and free up bodies such as the CCG to commission services jointly. I support the Government's efforts in trying to do that.

5.54 pm

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): I really welcome the opportunity to have this debate today, and we have heard some excellent speeches. I want to pay particular tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who made a powerful speech. I pay tribute to the work he has done and to his passion and commitment to bringing health and social care together. He deserves credit for that and I wish him all the best as he takes that fight beyond this place. I think he will do great things with it.

My local authority, Calderdale Council, has already written to the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Health to outline its concerns about the crippling underfunding of social care. Following a motion passed at full council, council leader Tim Swift has called on the Government to bring forward the better care fund, to develop a workforce strategy and to accelerate progress towards establishing a single pooled budget for health and social care in all areas by 2020. The King's Fund report has recently acknowledged that local authorities are having to make incredibly difficult decisions about where to make service reductions, with no room to make further savings. The report goes on to state that without further funding, most councils will soon be unable to meet even their basic statutory duties.

At a time when we are having yet another rethink about how we organise and structure NHS services with the sustainability and transformation plans, the NHS Confederation, which brings together all the different organisations that make up the NHS, has said in its representation to the Treasury that if the Government continue to fail to provide the right conditions to transform the service into one that is sustainable for the future, a tough challenge will become an impossible one. It cites the decisions to cut spending on public health through the local authority grant and to delay much needed social care funding until later in the Parliament as

[Holly Lynch]

examples, saying that while there is no doubt that these decisions have made short-term savings for the Treasury, there are strong indications that this will come at the expense of significant long-term costs and could hinder the transformation that we all want to see. Rob Webster, the chief executive officer of South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and the lead on the West Yorkshire and Harrogate sustainability and transformation plan, made this clear when he said:

“We must invest in social care and public health. Our STP shows quite clearly that modern health and care services focus on the whole person—and that means their mental, physical and social care needs. If we do not invest in social care and prevention, we may not have a sustainable NHS at all.”

I recently spent time with the Yorkshire Ambulance Service in my constituency, and I was particularly interested in how the paramedics would be affected by the proposed downgrade of services at Huddersfield royal infirmary. It was clear to me just how many ambulance call-outs, and consequent hospital stays, could have been avoided if appropriate mental health provision and social care had been in place. We visited an older gentleman who had initially simply become dehydrated. He had grown increasingly confused and, in his confusion, he had stopped taking his medication. His neighbours called an ambulance when they realised that he had become quite unwell as a result. According to the paramedics, that was not unusual and they would expect to see a number of similar calls over the course of a 12-hour shift. He was a proud man and was clearly distressed to think he had caused a fuss. That ambulance call-out and hospital stay could have been avoided had social care been in place, empowering him to live well in his own home and saving the NHS the cost of more serious interventions later on. That experience reinforces the case made by the NHS Confederation to the Government that without the appropriately funded delivery of mental health support and social care services, attempts to transform the NHS into a more sustainable model are doomed to fail.

Another issue that I want to touch on is respite care. My constituent, Mrs Burrows, came to see me in tears last week. Her elderly mother has Alzheimer's and a variety of related health complications. Following an assessment, Mrs Burrows was allocated eight weeks of respite care a year for her mum. Despite this allocation, she has to work with social services to find an appropriate establishment that is able to care for her mother. She also has to make the arrangements, but she struggles to find a place for her mother in residential care because temporary beds are just not available. Part of the problem is that she is able to book respite care only a week in advance, which means that she cannot plan ahead. She finds it difficult to book holidays or confirm her attendance at family events such as weddings. Mrs Burrows was particularly distressed because her daughter required urgent medical treatment and she desperately needed to find respite care for her mother so that she could look after her grandchildren while her daughter had the treatment. However, there were just no beds available.

I want to take this opportunity to commend the Alzheimer's Society for the work it has done with its Dementia Friends programme, which, as of 1 pm today, has trained 1,752,419 friends, all of whom now have an enhanced awareness of what it takes to support someone

to live well with dementia. It is a massive achievement, and I am proud to be one of those dementia friends. Worryingly, however, research undertaken by the Alzheimer's Society found that 38% of homecare workers do not receive any dementia training and that 71% do not receive dementia training that is accredited—despite the commitments made in the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia. Some 850,000 people are living with dementia in the UK and an estimated 400,000 of those are in receipt of some form of home care. The scale of the challenge is huge, but if we do not start working on finding the answers to both the availability and the quality of social care now, imagine the crisis we will be facing in five, 10 or 20 years' time.

Without an injection of investment into social care, we will have no chance of balancing the demands on the NHS. Good, proactive social care would require investment but it is not just the right thing to do; it would ultimately be cost-effective and prevent more costly and avoidable interventions later on.

6 pm

**Dr Daniel Poulter** (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), who articulately outlined some of the human challenges facing some of her constituents due to problems in the social care system. We have heard many contributions from right hon. and hon. Members today, many of whom drew upon their own front-line experience of working in the health and care system and of the difficulty in getting the right care that people up and down the country are facing.

We must remember that we are debating issues that affect real people and real people's lives, which we sometimes forget in the heat of political debate. We need to remember that social care and good social services are about providing basic dignity in the care of older people and disabled people with things such as dressing, eating and washing. No Member should forget the importance of personalised care that provides dignity. We need a system that is not only more integrated and joined up, but better funded than the current system, which is not adequately financed to meet the needs of the people it looks after.

I want to talk briefly about welcome initiatives such as vanguards, the better care fund and the STPs, which are moves in the right direction. I also want to discuss the future. The right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) was right when he highlighted some of the missed opportunities over the past two or three decades to grip the issues of improving social care and properly funding a sustainable health and care service. Before I do all that, it is worth pointing out some of the fundamental challenges facing the health and care system today.

However one dresses up the figures, there is an undoubted trend towards increasing delays in transfers of care. That is the truth that the figures show us. Of course, there are areas of good and bad practice, but the national trend in delayed transfers of care shows increasing pressure on the system. Budget reductions in the social care sector are real and amount to about £4 billion over the past decade. It is welcome that more money is coming into the system through the local precept, but that barely touches the sides when we consider the challenge of also meeting the increased demands of paying the national living wage. The NLW is a welcome initiative that will raise the living standards and quality

of life of many care workers by properly rewarding them for their work—or make a much better contribution towards doing so—but the change is nevertheless putting budgetary pressure on local authorities, which manifests itself in difficult decisions about how care is provided and rationed on the frontline.

One of the big trends of the past decade has been that many local authorities have tightened the eligibility assessment for social care. It is effectively now the case that someone has to be in severe need to receive social care, so we must recognise that the tightened criteria mean that those who receive social care are no longer those in moderate need. That is symptomatic of some of the budgetary pressures that the system faces.

The welcome initiatives—the vanguards, the better care fund and the STPs—are all about the better joining up of what health and social care do together, but we must remember that STPs have perhaps come about in spite of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 rather than because of it. Prior to the 2012 Act, we had strategic health authorities, which helped to co-ordinate care at a regional level. Those were abolished and disappeared. STPs are now a welcome return to the recognition that we need a degree of regional co-ordination of our health and social care system in order to deliver the right care. That co-ordination must be across primary care, secondary care and social care. Housing providers are equally important, because many delayed discharges from hospital are due to the lack of appropriate housing for people with mental health conditions and dementia who do not have the right houses or the right circumstances at home. That is an important part of delivering those local plans to make sure that the system works better for people.

The elephant in the room is of course funding. Yes, we need to transform services, and more money is needed to do that. There are transformation budgets available through STPs to support clinical commissioning groups in delivering improvements in the NHS, but that will barely touch the sides and will not make enough of a difference. The great tragedy is that if we really want to drive integration, we must put the money into the same place. We must properly fund the integration and joining up of care. The loss of opportunity before the 2010 election was highlighted by the right hon. Member for Leigh. I urge the Government to look again at having cross-party talks to consider a sustainable future for the health and care system in which we all believe.

6.6 pm

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I think we all agree that the way in which a society looks after its vulnerable and elderly is a mark of its humanity. By that measure, our Government are failing. Social care services are facing financial crisis under the Tories, with social care funding slashed by £4.6 billion over the course of the last Parliament. We know that demand for care is rising, yet fewer people are receiving services. Between 2001 and 2015, the number of people aged over 85 increased by more than 38%, and the number of people with limiting long-term illnesses increased by 1.4 million, which means that the challenges are great. Despite rising demand, fewer people are receiving support. Research by the King's Fund and the Nuffield Trust shows that 25% fewer older people are receiving social care support today, compared with just five years ago. Research by

the London School of Economics shows that 500,000 people who would have had access to social care in 2009 are no longer entitled to it.

Funding for social care remains insufficient and that only increases the cost to our national health service, as many Members have observed. The Government have announced increased funding from 2017-18 for the NHS better care fund, which aims to integrate health and social care and allow councils to raise council tax by up to 2% to fund adult social care from April. However, there is a shortfall of £1.1 billion simply to maintain care levels at the 2014-15 level. According to the King's Fund, £5.5 billion has been taken out of social care budgets in the past six years. The most recent budget survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services in England highlights that an extra £1.1 billion investment is needed simply to maintain care provision at the same level as last year.

Research from the Nuffield Trust, the Health Foundation and the King's Fund demonstrates that, even if every council were to utilise the precept, the estimated funding gap, taking into account the impact of the living wage, will be between £2.8 billion and £3.5 billion in 2019-20.

ADASS states that the social care precept this year raises less than two thirds of the calculated costs of the new national living wage. This significant and sustained underfunding is resulting in a loss of independence and quality of life for older and disabled people, and reductions in carer support, undermining the positive changes for carers introduced in the Care Act 2014.

In the past six months, 62% of councils have had residential and nursing home closures and 57% have had care providers hand back contracts. The closure of services and the handing back of contracts have affected more than 10,000 people using council-funded care.

There is significant regional variation, too. ADASS has already reported the inequality in funding for local authorities collecting the 2% precept, stating that it raises

“much more in some areas than others and raises least in areas with the greatest need for social care.”

Although the Government have said that the additional funding from the better care fund will be used to top up funding for local authorities that will raise less from the precept, that extra funding will not be released until 2017-18 when it will deliver only £105 million.

I wish to talk very briefly about the impact on the national health service. Before doing so, let me say that, despite the Secretary of State's warm words around STPs and local decision-making, he is doing nothing to allay the fears of patients, carers and NHS staff in Wirral about the risks that are posed to services at Arrowe Park hospital in my constituency.

We know that good social care is far less costly than a hospital stay. The crisis in social care means that patients are forced to stay in hospital for weeks or sometimes months longer than they need to because they cannot get the care they need in the community. The social care crisis is affecting our NHS. The Care Quality Commission said recently that the level of cuts to social care is forcing hospitals to admit more patients as emergencies, who they are then unable to discharge because the social care that they need is not available for them at home. The number of patients unable to leave hospital because of the unavailability of social care has risen

[Margaret Greenwood]

70% since 2012. The CQC's most recent annual report shows that the number of hospital bed days lost through patients being unable to leave because of social care not being available has increased 70% since April 2012.

Delays in securing these vital social care services and the desire to free hospital beds can put extra pressure on families at the point of discharge. Evidence shows that of carers who have recent experience of hospital discharge, a quarter report that they were not consulted about the process. Almost six in 10 carers said that they did not feel that they had a choice about providing care to the person following their discharge from hospital. In other words, families feel that there are no alternatives available.

If a carer is unprepared or simply unable to care for their loved one when they are discharged and no support is put in place, families can find it difficult to cope. This not only has a huge impact on the individual needing care, but can cause significant cost to the NHS, as re-admission is more likely. It is important that in debates such as this, we remember those people who do not have family to help them. The implications for them are far worse. It is vital that we address the failings in our social care system. The Government must find the money needed to fund it properly.

Finally, I want to say a few words about the impact on carers. I have a high number of carers in my constituency who play a vital role in providing care, but it is unfair to expect them increasingly to prop up a social care system in crisis. With that in mind, I urge the Government to do all they can, to take note of the concerns expressed in today's debate, and to find the funding both to address the current crisis and to put in place a long-term settlement to ensure that care is there for those who need it, whether they are elderly or vulnerable in any other respect.

6.12 pm

**Heidi Allen** (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The motion that we are debating is wide ranging because when we talk about social care, we are talking about the needs of older people, the disabled and their carers. In my constituency, we have one of the fastest-growing ageing populations in the country, so I understand only too well the pressures placed on my hospital, Addenbrooke's, when elderly patients cannot be discharged.

My county council, NHS trusts and CCG are well aware of these challenges and are working well together as a team to see what transformation is possible to break the cycle, just as the Secretary of State recommended. However, I know that although they are determined and very capable, they are not miracle workers. As local authority budgets are reduced and we are rightly asking for better value for taxpayer money, it is inevitable that the pace of change will be different and variable across the country, and my worry is that the standard of care may suffer while that transformation occurs.

I believe that our care providers have the potential to transform. The question is whether they can do so swiftly enough and whether they can do it without a short, fast boost of additional funding to release them from the unrelenting pressure so they can find the head room to manage and make change.

Many of the issues that we face in the care sector apply equally to the disabled and to the elderly. Supporting the vulnerable is a moral and political priority, so for those who cannot help themselves, including the 1.5 million people living with a disability in the UK, we must help our care providers adapt. I shall focus on the disabled, as we have heard a lot about the elderly today.

Our growing and ageing population means that the current terms for the delivery of these vital services are no longer sustainable. Many providers have nowhere left to turn and are withdrawing from services that help those most in need. I have visited such a provider in my constituency, Voyage Care, which delivers 24-hour support to adults with significant disabilities. The care staff are the most humbling and dedicated human beings I have ever met. I am so proud to have them looking after my constituents, but they cannot continue to deliver a service on local authority rates that are frozen year after year. Fortunately, this year I have managed to help them secure a very small uplift, just enough to keep their heads above water, but throw in rural geography, a higher national minimum wage, changes to payments for sleep-in shifts, and a likely reduction in the number of keen eastern European carers coming here, and we start to run out of options.

The Government's transforming care programme sets out a clear vision for ensuring people with learning disabilities receive the right level of high quality care in their local communities to support them in living as independently as possible. We have some great tools at our disposal to facilitate pathways into independence and employment, such as Access to Work, so let's get smart about this. By supporting this community transition, we generate not only life chances but economic activity. Some 45% of young disabled people want their social care support to help them find and stay in work, but their care package does not include such support.

The debate must also draw attention to supporting our carers. I immediately thought of Alan, one of my constituents, who looks after his mum, Marion, who has very progressed Alzheimer's, in one of my villages. He has dedicated his adult life to looking after her, but he needs a break, too. I know he has just about managed, but that is at huge personal and financial sacrifice. The value of the care that carers such as Alan provide is about £132 billion—almost equivalent to the UK's total health care annual spend—so this little debate, Alan, is for you and your mum, Marion.

In financial terms, the Government have rightly allocated money via the better care fund, but we really cannot wait until the end of the Parliament—we need to do all we can to bring that money forward now. The precept is not enough; even if every council out there had taken up that offer, it would have generated £380 million, not the £1 billion shortfall. So we need to bring that better care funding forward, and it will provide an immediate uplift to councils so that they can pay care workers an appropriate wage. However, we should also be looking closely at how care is given, based on time spent, not tasks—and that means proper time, because I want to see an end to these 15-minute slots. Our country is more civilised than that, and cutting corners now means more costs later.

It is not enough for the Opposition to simply demand more money. The complexity of these issues and the current economic climate mean it is simply not good

enough to make such demands without offering solutions. To transform the social care landscape, we need to be as brave as those care providers we are asking to work in a new way. As the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) so eloquently put it, we need to work together to come up with new ideas. So let's get smart. We need to fund areas based on their proportion of older and disabled residents, not on deprivation, as the funding model currently does. We need to ensure—legislating if necessary—that councils, the NHS and CCGs pool their money and resources. The key to unlocking a new model of social care, as we have heard loud and clear today, is to make a team effort. Those in my area are working in partnership, but the Government need to set up a health and social care commission to pull these work streams together. Health and social care are entwined, but, currently, the decision-making and budget priorities are not.

The Care Quality Commission said the system has reached a “tipping point”, with providers starting to hand contracts back. I have seen it in my own county—it is true. So let us work together as a team and come up with a brand-new plan for social care in the 21st century.

6.17 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I want to pay tribute to the careworkers across the country who will be spending today and every day looking after vulnerable adults in their homes and in residential settings. The work they do is hard—often impossibly hard in the current context. On too many occasions, they are paid very little, and they are often provided with little training to equip them for their work.

I am a member of the Communities and Local Government Committee, which is undertaking an inquiry on adult social care. The Committee is yet to report, but, for my part, I think that much of the evidence we have seen and heard to date is damning. The proportion of GDP we spend on social care is falling at a time when need and demand are rising and will continue to rise. That is being felt in a system that is barely able to cope.

The Committee has heard evidence from local authorities that are having care contracts handed back by providers that cannot make them work, with careworkers facing impossible case loads. We have seen evidence of negligent providers, with owners paying themselves six-figure salaries while failing to provide even the most basic standards of care.

Last month, I attended the launch of the CQC's “State of Care” report. David Behan, the chief executive of the CQC, spoke about how he and his team had agonised over whether to use the phrase “tipping point” in relation to social care, but, in the end, they decided that it was an accurate description for the state of the care sector. While there is much good practice and high quality care, structural problems in the sector and with the resourcing of care are leading to more and more care being provided on a basis that is simply not sustainable. As that happens, the scope for error and neglect, and for vulnerable people to be let down, is growing.

The Government's approach to funding social care simply is not working. While take-up of the 2% social care council tax precept is high, many local authorities have told the Committee that the funds raised simply do not cover the shortfall left by the cuts to their budget in

preceding years—still less the cost of the national living wage, and still less the increase in demand. The back-loading of the better care fund to the later years of the current Parliament is not working. I asked a local government Minister earlier this year whether he thought that that back-loading created a risk that smaller care home providers would exit the sector in the short term, leading to a loss of capacity at a time when demand is growing. He assured me that that would not be the case, but we are now seeing evidence that that is exactly what is happening. Often, local authority funding does not cover the full cost of providing care, and there is no slack in the system to provide for the investment needed to improve facilities and performance where necessary, so many providers are simply moving out of the market.

I recently visited a care home in my constituency that is provided by a small charity and is rated good by the CQC. The manager told me that, time and again, what the local authority agrees to pay does not meet the full cost of the care provided by the care home, and that it regularly subsidises residents from its reserves. That situation is completely untenable in the long term. I am very concerned that, by the time the increase in the better care fund is available in 2019-20, many small providers will have found the financial strain too much to bear, and that there will be a significant drop in capacity at the precise time when we will need capacity to meet growing need.

The quality of our care sector matters so much, because the way in which we look after our most vulnerable residents is a mark of our civilisation, and because the need to care for frail and elderly relatives is an issue for every single family in the country at some time in their lives.

Our social care system is not delivering the quality of care or the dignity and compassion that our vulnerable residents need. Neither is it delivering sufficient support for our unpaid carers, whether that is due to a lack of respite provision or to the difficulties that too many carers face in obtaining the assessment of their own needs, which is their statutory right. The underfunding of adult social care is, in turn, having an enormous impact on our NHS through avoidable hospital admissions and delayed discharge, and there is also the mental health impact of loneliness and isolation.

The Government must act now to address the state of our care system. We need more funding for social care—that cannot be denied—and I call on the Government urgently to bring forward the increase in the better care fund. We need a commitment to training for care staff and to fair terms and conditions, and I call on the Government to adopt the Unison ethical care charter as the standard for care across the country, because we know that better paid, better qualified and fairly treated carers also provide better standards of care. We need a fully integrated system that recognises the benefits and savings that can come from ensuring that vulnerable adults are well cared for and supported to live independently and remain active for longer. We also need support for unpaid carers, who save the taxpayer billions of pounds by providing care that would otherwise need to be provided by the state. Cuts in respite care, a lack of mental health support and inadequate carers' assessments are a false economy, and the Government need to support carers to do their vital work without being pushed to breaking point.

[Helen Hayes]

I hope that the Minister will respond to the debate by confirming emergency measures to address the crisis and a wholesale review of the care sector so that it can be established on a fit-for-purpose, sustainable footing for the future. I also hope that the Chancellor will use the autumn statement to introduce proposals for the sustainable funding of social care, to relieve the burden on our NHS and, most importantly, to enable all of our vulnerable adults to live well supported, with dignity, for the whole of their lives.

6.23 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): My constituency has one of the highest rates of over-65-year-olds. They comprise 28% of my constituents, compared with the national average of just 17%. Indeed, the town of Bexhill has more 85-year-olds per head of population than any other part of the UK. Given those statistics, adult social care is a key driver in the success of our local public services. Not only is it directly relevant to the wellbeing of many of my elderly constituents, but it determines the ability of all my constituents to gain rapid access to their hospital and GP. It also determines the amount of money that is diverted away from other local public services, such as education and transport.

I want to touch on two issues where there is more to do to improve social care. First, of 35 care homes in my constituency that have been rated by the CQC, none has been rated outstanding and only six have been rated good. The remainder require improvement or are inadequate, and they have six months to turn performance around or they may be closed. If our local schools were failing in the same way, there would be outrage. That our often vulnerable residents, who are often without a voice, are being subject to that standard is a national disgrace that I do not believe should be tolerated, and I welcome the Government's tougher approach to the inspection regime.

Having met the CQC to get behind the reason for the failure of those inspections, I believe that much of it is down to the design of care home buildings, many of which, because of their age, cannot easily be adapted from traditional residential homes for the elderly into modern care facilities. More people can use technology to enable them to stay in their own homes, so care homes tend to have a higher proportion of patients who have complex health needs.

Many homes are failing CQC inspections because they cannot demonstrate that they can evacuate residents in an emergency, and they do not have the right spatial design to keep residents active and engaged. The state of our care homes means that not only do residents not have the best wellbeing, but when individuals have to stay in hospital, authorities may be unable to discharge them back to care homes because no places are available if those homes are failing the inspection regime and are thus out of bounds. That leads to bed shortages in hospitals and to expensive longer stays.

There is an alternative. I recently attended the opening of a new state-of-the-art apartment block in Bexhill that offers shared ownership and rentals to the over-60s, some of whom are local authority-supported. Residents live independently and share in-house restaurants and amenities, which are also open to the public. For younger

residents, it feels like any other smart apartment block with its mod cons. Crucially, however, the building offers facilities and care packages, so that as residents get older, they can access care but remain in their apartments. They can arrive at 60, and the design allows them to remain there for life. It is an excellent model for the future, but it was possible only because our county and district councils provided land and funding for our amazing housing association, AmicusHorizon, to build out.

Across our constituencies, land is being developed for housing. Every developer is required to provide infrastructure such as schools, GP surgeries and other public amenities. Care homes are private businesses, however, so there is no requirement to provide them. Since 50% of our care home patients are funded by the state, I suggest to Ministers that they fold in a requirement for developers to provide land or section 106 moneys to enable housing authorities and care companies to deliver the innovative new accommodation that will take people to their last days. Such accommodation should be part of the design as much as a school or a GP surgery is.

The second issue pertains to the joining up of our NHS and local authority social care providers. Much has been made of sustainability and transformation plans and of integrating adult social care and clinical care. I therefore congratulate East Sussex County Council and our NHS team in East Sussex, who have recognised that the £200 million of savings required from the STP and the delivery of a better care package can be better achieved if they join up and work together. Their "Better Together" project is designed, in their words, to "spend £850m wisely, not saving £200m badly."

To deliver that programme, our local team is implementing a single point for health professionals to access support, integrating social and community care under one management structure, offering frailty practitioner support for the over-75s for early intervention and putting prevention teams together for high-risk members of our community. The results thus far have been encouraging for adult social care: the number of clients going under early intervention watch has increased by 20%; early intervention has kept people out of hospital; 77% of clients have remained at home following early intervention; and there has been a notable reduction in the number of falls. I highlight those issues because they are key drivers for the improvement of social care.

The delivery by the Government of an extra £3.5 billion is welcome. However, it is crucial that we question the operating model in social care. To do so will not only make resources stretch further, but deliver the ideas and innovation that will improve the lives of those who rely on social care in their latter years.

6.28 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Across the UK, local government funding has been reduced by 37% in real terms between 2010 and 2016, and the Local Government Association has estimated that councils' overall funding gap will amount to £5.8 billion by the end of this parliamentary cycle. Those cuts to council services have severely taken their toll on the health and social care provision that millions of people rely on. That now presents an immediate risk to those patients and providers. Councils face a £1.9 billion funding gap in adult social care. We are at what the Care Quality Commission has said is "a tipping point".

In my constituency of Heywood and Middleton, we have been hit hard. Rochdale Council has had to make huge Government cuts of £200 million in the past six years. Social care budgets face even more pressure in the next two years, as the council is forced to save a further £40 million. The social care precept of 2% on council tax this year will raise only about £1.4 million, which is a drop in the ocean of Rochdale's total adult social care budget of £80 million.

Inevitably, there have been serious consequences as a result of this underfunding. Our hospitals and A&E departments report a 70% increase in bed-blocking. They identify the cause as the fact that social care is not available to allow patients to be discharged safely. The figure was 108,000 in April 2012, but it was a staggering 184,000 this July. Bed occupancy rates exceeded 91% during January to March 2016, which is the highest quarterly rate in the past six years.

These figures serve to emphasise that cuts to social care services have had an inevitable knock-on effect on the NHS, heightening the bed-blocking problem, as patients are forced to stay in hospital for longer because they are unable to get the support that they need at home. By properly funding adult social care, we could remove the burden from our hospitals, so that they could carry on the important acute work for which their services are intended.

I want to talk about home care providers and their staff. According to the local government ombudsman, they are "underfunded and over-stretched". Sadly, there has been a rise in cases of neglect in patient care and a failure to deliver a decent and fair wage to carers. Some 63% of staff said they had less time to spend with the people they care for because of staff shortages, and nearly two thirds are doing their job alongside fewer staff than they were six years ago. The trade union Unison has said:

"Cuts have left a trail of destruction and this is affecting those in desperate need of care. Care workers do a vital job looking after the most vulnerable in society. But they're not getting the support they need from their employers."

I agree with Unison. Carers are an integral part of the healthcare system, and they must be valued and properly remunerated for the work they carry out, year in, year out.

I hope that now we have had a change of Prime Minister and Chancellor, we might have a change of mind and a change of heart on this issue. The autumn statement is the first opportunity to reassure the public that this will be a Government who not only work for everyone, but care for everyone. The importance of investment has been acknowledged on all sides of the debate. Stephen Dalton, chief executive of the NHS Confederation, has said:

"The critical and negative tipping point for the health and care system has been triggered by cuts to social care. It's imperative the chancellor takes the opportunity, in the autumn statement, to prioritise investment in social care before the winter."

This issue needs to be addressed immediately. It cannot wait any longer.

Some people are of the view, locally, that the devolution deal in Greater Manchester might provide a solution to the underfunding of adult social care. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who is now Labour's Greater Manchester mayoral candidate, has long campaigned on the integration of health and

social care, which he has talked about in this debate. If he is elected, that will give him an opportunity to put these plans into action. However, with devolution comes a £1.2 billion to £2 billion black hole in the finances. For healthcare to be properly devolved, it is vital that it is properly resourced and properly funded.

The Government must act to give health and social care services the investment and protection that they desperately need. In the long term, we must fully integrate health and social care, otherwise many of the most vulnerable and defenceless people will be left facing a prolonged winter of discontent and displacement.

6.34 pm

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful and heartfelt comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes).

Today is Unison's SOS—save our services—day of action, so I join it in calling on the Government to ensure that social care is properly funded, so that people in this country can be properly looked after.

In the past six years, the largest share of cuts has fallen on local government. Given that councils spend a third of their budget on social care, the Government will have known from the very start that social care would be one of the biggest casualties of their spending programme.

The budget of North East Lincolnshire Council has been cut by more than £70 million since 2010, with a further £7 million of cuts to be made by next year, causing spending on adult social care in my constituency to fall by 20% since 2010. People have been forced to live in completely unacceptable conditions, because there is not enough funding to provide adequate care.

I know of wheelchair-bound adults living in a care home in Great Grimsby who have been waiting for over two years for the button that automatically opens the door out of their flat to be fixed. At the moment, until a carer comes to visit, they are effectively trapped in their own home. That is an unacceptable position to leave people in, but it is just one example of the state of social care today.

The council has had to limit access to adaptations by increasing the thresholds for accessing them and capping spending. Disabled and elderly people are therefore often left in unsuitable housing. Understandably, that is also hugely frustrating for carers who are trying their best to look after people in inadequate conditions, while having continually to fight the council and care providers for the improvements they need.

A constituent who cares for his adult son was told by occupational health about six months ago that his home needed the back door widened and a ramp and lift installed. He feels as though he is being deliberately fobbed off, rather than getting the help he needs to look after his son properly. It is as uncomfortable for the son to live in those conditions as it is frustrating for the father to be unable to look after him properly.

Today, the Communities and Local Government Committee took evidence from family and friend carers who save the state so much money. One issue that was raised was the disconnect between the NHS and local authorities at the point of discharge from hospital. There were reports of families feeling abandoned when

[Melanie Onn]

discharge occurs, with very limited support being accessible and no single point of contact or dedicated service to guide people through the options available to them and their families. That heightens the risk of readmission to hospital for many of those patients, costing the state even more money.

The carers spoke of the neglect of their own physical and mental health, with their overriding concern being for their loved ones. Respite that had previously been offered is ending. We heard the example today of two hours of respite being provided a week. That does not seem like an awful lot, but it was a lifeline to the women who came and gave evidence. That was provided by a local charity and funded by the local authority. It is now going to end because of cuts being made to and by the local authority.

We also heard about a looming crisis in intergenerational care, with a gap of hundreds of thousands of carers predicted over the next 10 years. The pressure on social care services provided by the state is only set to increase. As we heard at Prime Minister's Question Time today from my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins), there are also problems with dementia and Alzheimer's services.

The social care precept is not the way to solve this problem. As we have heard, the areas with the highest demand for care are often those where the precept will raise the least. Furthermore, the Chair of the Health Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), claimed earlier this month that the additional funds raised through the precept have been "entirely swallowed up" in higher wages for carers. Although I am glad that carers are being paid more, albeit still not a proper living wage, councils are therefore unable to allocate any of the new funds to improving care.

When the right hon. Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) announced the social care precept this time last year, he said:

"The truth we need to confront is that many local authorities will not be able to meet growing social care needs unless they have new sources of funding."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1363.]

Although the Government have accepted the need to better fund social care, they still need to find that new money if the growing demand for care is to be met. This is not only about supporting people who need that support in their old age or because of a disability; it affects us all. As the then Chancellor also said last year:

"The health service cannot function effectively without good social care."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1364.]

Failing to fund social care properly means that patients are forced to remain in hospital for weeks longer than they need to, blocking beds for new patients who need them and pushing up hospital waiting times. Meanwhile, every day the patient kept in hospital costs the NHS far more than caring for them in a suitable environment would.

6.40 pm

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I welcome the contributions made by Members on both sides of the House today. They have highlighted the scale of the crisis we face in adult social care. My right hon. Friend

the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) set out passionately the long-standing need for integration. We had informative and knowledgeable contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Halton (Derek Twigg), for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan), for Halifax (Holly Lynch), for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) and for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn). On the Government side, we also heard thoughtful contributions from the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and the hon. Members for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman).

It seems we all agree that there is a crisis. I believe that 2017 will be a make-or-break year for our social care system. That system is currently teetering on the edge of a precipice. More and more, we find that local authorities can no longer afford to fulfil their statutory obligations regarding the social care of elderly and disabled people. Social care providers are handing contracts back to councils because they are no longer financially viable. Beds in hospitals are occupied for weeks—sometimes even months—by people who are well enough to leave but cannot because there is no social care available for them once they do.

**Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): In a matter of months, within the still secret Staffordshire STP, the projected 2021 deficit for social care has jumped from just over £100 million to £256 million. With the NHS deficit, that makes more than half a billion pounds now, excluding anything from Stoke-on-Trent. Without further funding and investment, that gap is simply unbridgeable, so it is hardly surprising that in the past few days both the STP chair and its programme director have tendered their resignations.

**Teresa Pearce:** I am glad my hon. Friend has had the chance to raise that very important point.

The crisis is affecting elderly people across the country, as we have heard eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley). More than a million elderly people in this country who need social care are getting no support. Half of older people who have difficulty bathing or getting dressed receive no support. One third of all older people who have difficulty going to the toilet on their own are receiving no support. An estimated 1.1 million are chronically lonely. Is it any wonder that almost 4 million older people in this country now say that television is their only source of company? That is happening on our watch, and we should all be both saddened and shamed by it.

The rise in demand for social care does not come as a surprise to any of us, however. We live in a society with an ageing population. We must concentrate on building a sustainable social care system to meet that rising demand. Members across the House know from their own constituencies, as I do from mine, that the spending cuts have already hit vulnerable people. One in 10 care homes has closed since 2010, and 400,000 fewer people accessed care in the last Parliament because of funding reductions. According to Learning Disability Voices, a shocking three quarters of all people who apply for social care support from their local council are now turned away.

For those who can access care, the bar for what can be described as care gets lower and lower. Staffing levels have been so severely reduced that workers have barely any time to actually look after people. As we have heard, some visits have been cut from 30 to 15 minutes. That is 15 minutes to make someone dinner, to bathe them, to give them medication, to change their sheets and to give them any other help they might need. It is barely time to take your coat off and say hello. In fact, 15 minutes is about the time we take in this place to divide. I hope Members will bear that in mind when they pass through the Lobby shortly.

The King's Fund has described the care system as a "threadbare local authority safety net."

Although the majority of those receiving care are elderly people, roughly a third are younger people who have a physical disability, learning disability or mental health problem. These people are far less likely to have income to support them and far less likely to have children who can care for them as they get older. In fact, they are more likely to have elderly relatives who live in dread of what will happen when they are gone.

When disabled people are looked after in the community, with a local authority-provided care package, their needs are reduced by up to 50%. We often hear about needing to reduce the dependency culture, and the provision of social care, including day centres, does just that: it allows people with disabilities to live an independent and healthy life. Rather than allowing this sector to crumble, we should be looking at how to invest in it and expand it. It is said, and has been said here today, that the mark of a civilised society is how we treat the disabled, the elderly and the vulnerable. We are failing that test miserably.

Let us be clear about one thing: this crisis is not the fault of those working in the social care sector. In fact, they are among the most undervalued and underpaid workers in the country. Neither is this crisis the fault of local government. Nobody goes into local government and public service to cut care and support for the vulnerable. Local authorities are trying to plug the gap. In 2014 alone, councils diverted £900 million from other budgets to maintain the current level of social care, despite making efficiency savings. Local councils are on the frontline of government, providing the integral services that our communities rely on. It is simply impossible for them to plug the momentous funding gap in adult social care that they face. Let us make no mistake about the root of this crisis: it is the stark result of the austerity policies pursued by the previous Chancellor. It is his six years of brutal and devastating cuts to local government that have brought us here.

If we let our elderly and disabled people languish in loneliness and frustration in unhygienic and inadequate conditions, it will be a stain on our collective conscience. What kind of country would we be? When the new Prime Minister took up her position, she stood on the steps of No. 10 and said she wanted

"a country that works for everyone."

Today, the Government have an opportunity to prove that the Prime Minister meant what she said. I would like the Minister to consider three questions when he responds to the debate. Will he confirm that the better care funding is not additional money, but has in fact been taken from the existing NHS budget? What assessment has he made of the effect of the living wage on care

contracts, and does he have an estimate of how many contracts will be exited in the next 12 months by providers? Will he let me know what steps and checks he is making to ensure that local authorities are not commissioning 15-minute care visits, as recommended in their own guidelines? If the Minister cannot answer those questions today, I hope he will write to me in the coming weeks.

We are all hopeful that the autumn statement will bring forward urgent funding to stem an impending crisis in social care, but there must also be a strategy to put social care on a sustainable, long-term footing so that people can grow old in this country without fear, and disabled people can live with dignity and safety. The Government must recognise that by stripping local government of its funding to the point that even statutory requirements are difficult to meet, we will not benefit the economy or productivity of this country, or the wellbeing of our society. As the sixth-richest economy in the world, this country can, and must, provide this vital assistance to the most vulnerable people in society.

6.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** We have had a good debate, with a number of very good speeches from both sides of the House. I will try to respond to the points, or the themes of those points, that have been made.

First, I want to address the accusations, made by Labour Members, of criminal behaviour in relation to the minimum wage not being adhered to. If such evidence exists—I think the hon. Members for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) and for Tooting (Dr Allin-Khan) raised this issue—please bring it to me. I will see that it goes to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Those involved will be named and shamed. Such behaviour is illegal and is not to be tolerated. I think the hon. Member for Tooting also said she had evidence that a care home or domiciliary supplier was forging attendance sheets. Again, if there is evidence of that I would like it to be brought forward. It should not just be bandied about here in a political way. We should investigate it and we will. If she brings that evidence to me, we will look at it.

One of the big themes in this debate, and one with which Members on both sides of the House can agree, is the importance of carers. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) spoke about that and, rightly, about the need for a better career structure and clearer training requirements, a point the Cavendish report also addressed. Some 1.5 million people work in domiciliary and care homes, but—this is a very difficult statistic—the annual turnover is about 25%. That is caused not just by poor pay—I am proud to be part of a Government who have increased the pay of many of these people—but by lack of career structure and, frankly, of regard, and we need to do more on that. She was right to raise it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) made the important point that, as well as the 1.5 million paid carers, there are 1.1 million unpaid carers. In many ways, these are the unsung heroes of the entire system, and we can all agree we need to do better by them. When he was doing my job, he kicked off the carers' strategy, which we will be coming forward with. It is a cross-Government initiative and will result in concrete actions to make the 1.1 million-strong unpaid carer cohort better off.

[David Mowat]

Several people talked about finances and money. Of course they are tight. The Secretary of State made it clear that in the last Parliament, in order to respond to the situation we inherited, there were cuts to local government funding. During the course of this Parliament, there will be a real increase in the rate of adult care funding, but that is not to say we do not understand that the system is under pressure. We understand that, as Simon Stevens said, if more money was available, it would be good if it went into the social care system.

Members on both sides of the House spoke about bed-blocking caused by a lack of money, and about delayed transfers of care, and it is true. Of course there is a correlation between the amount of money in the system and the number of delayed transfers of care, but one of the most extraordinary things about the numbers is that, between the best and worst 10% of local authorities, in terms of the number of DTOCs, the difference is a factor of 20 to 25. That is not just about budgets—budgets are not 20 to 25 times different; it is about leadership; about good people doing good work; about spreading best practice; about shared assessments, early discharge and discharge to assess; and about integration in the widest sense, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire said. Those councils, local authorities and health systems that have gone fastest and furthest with integration—the holy grail that the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) talked about—are those at the top end of the DTOC statistics. We should all think about that when we say, “We want more money.” We should all think about the reasons for that difference.

I would make another point about finance. An Opposition Member talked about the GDP equation getting worse in this Parliament. That is not true, but I would just make this point: in 2016, the OECD looked at the amount of money spent on adult social care right across the major economies of Europe, and we in the UK spend about 20% to 25% more than other major industrialised countries such as Germany and France. That is not to say that the system is not under pressure in our country—it clearly is—but the facts are that other countries do a better job in terms of long-term saving, social insurance and some of those types of things. We clearly have an issue with this. Let me repeat that Germany and France, which in the round spend more on the entire health system than we do—about 1% more as a proportion of GDP—spend 25% to 30% less on adult social care. It is critical to spend what we can spend better.

**Andy Burnham:** I hear what the Minister says, but it seems to me that, in common with the Secretary of State, he is avoiding the main issue. The main issue is the urgent financial crisis that councils are facing. They have not got enough money to care for the people who need care. Will the Minister answer a direct question? Has he or the Secretary of State made a submission to the Treasury for more funding for social care as part of the autumn statement—yes or no?

**David Mowat:** We are not having the autumn statement today, and we are not going to give a commentary on what will come out of the autumn statement. We—the Secretary of State and I—have accepted that the care

system is under pressure. I was just making the point that other countries spend less, and that we need to spend every penny we can as effectively and as well as we can. During the course of this Parliament, moreover, there will be a real increase in the amount of spending on social care.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**David Mowat:** Let me make some progress, and I shall give way again later.

Another theme has been closure. Several Members have talked about contracts being handed back, and there is a bit of that going on in both domiciliary care and care homes. Let me put on record the fact that the number of bed places in care and nursing homes is broadly the same as it was five years ago. There has been no reduction. As for domiciliary care providers in the market, the number is now 47% higher than it was five years ago. There has been, rightly, a trend away from care homes to domiciliary care—and we should all welcome that, because people broadly want to spend more time in their own homes. I was asked a good question about the issue of 15 minutes of domiciliary care and what we are doing about the problem. When the CQC is doing its quality reviews, it has a specific question to ascertain whether 15 minutes is the norm, and if so, it would result in a poor quality assessment.

Members have raised broader issues of quality. Let me therefore say that 72% of care homes—a sector that is under a great deal of stress—are good or outstanding. This Government have been the first to do any kind of inspection to find that out. Of course some care homes are inadequate. As the Secretary of State said, inadequate care homes go into special measures and can be closed down after six months. That is the right thing to do, and we should be pleased and proud that that happens.

Also, users of care homes have been asked whether or not they are satisfied, and just under 70% said that they are either extremely satisfied or very satisfied with the level of care provided for them. Members of all parties should come together on this point and thank the people who work in these care homes for the dedicated care and the humanity that they provide.

The former Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter), who is no longer in his place, talked interestingly about the vanguards, the STPs and what we are doing to bring in leading-edge better care models. A lot of work is being done on the STPs, and I heard a couple of Opposition Members say favourable things about their STPs.

The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) asked me a number of specific questions about his STP. I will probably not have time to answer in detail, but I can say this. His STP and my STP are the same, and it is being published today—[*Interruption.*] It is certainly not secret, and we should have some dialogue about it. The hon. Gentleman made the point that his council was under pressure, and councils are under pressure. I think we should join together to congratulate both Halton and Warrington Councils on being two of the best performing councils in the country on delayed transfers of care and on increasing their budget.

I finish by—

**Mr Nicholas Brown** (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab)  
*claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

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

*Question agreed to.*

*Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31 (2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.*

*The House divided: Ayes 200, Noes 279.*

**Division No. 83]**

**[6.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane  
Abrahams, Debbie  
Alexander, Heidi  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Bailey, Mr Adrian  
Barron, rh Sir Kevin  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blackman-Woods, Dr  
    Robert  
Blomfield, Paul  
Brabin, Tracy  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Bryant, Chris  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burnham, rh Andy  
Butler, Dawn  
Byrne, rh Liam  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
Carmichael, rh Mr  
    Alistair  
Champion, Sarah  
Chapman, Jenny  
Clwyd, rh Ann  
Coaker, Vernon  
Cooper, Julie  
Cooper, rh Yvette  
Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
Coyle, Neil  
Crausby, Mr David  
Creagh, Mary  
Creasy, Stella  
Cruddas, Jon  
Cryer, John  
Cummins, Judith  
Cunningham, Alex  
Cunningham, Mr  
    Jim  
Dakin, Nic  
Danczuk, Simon  
David, Wayne  
Davies, Geraint  
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
Doughty, Stephen  
Dowd, Jim  
Dowd, Peter  
Durkan, Mark  
Eagle, Ms Angela  
Eagle, Maria  
Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive  
Elliott, Julie  
Ellman, Mrs Louise  
Elmore, Chris  
Esterson, Bill  
Evans, Chris  
Farrelly, Paul  
Farron, Tim  
Field, rh Frank  
Fitzpatrick, Jim  
Flelo, Robert  
Fletcher, Colleen  
Flynn, Paul  
Fovargue, Yvonne  
Foxcroft, Vicky  
Furniss, Gill  
Gapes, Mike  
Glass, Pat  
Glindon, Mary  
Godsiff, Mr Roger  
Goodman, Helen  
Green, Kate  
Greenwood, Margaret  
Griffith, Nia  
Gwynne, Andrew  
Haigh, Louise  
Hanson, rh Mr David  
Harris, Carolyn  
Hayes, Helen  
Hayman, Sue  
Hendrick, Mr Mark  
Hillier, Meg  
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
Hoey, Kate  
Hollern, Kate  
Hollobone, Mr Philip  
Hopkins, Kelvin  
Howarth, rh Mr  
    George  
Hunt, Tristram  
Huq, Dr Rupa  
Hussain, Imran  
Jarvis, Dan  
Johnson, rh Alan  
Johnson, Diana  
Jones, Graham  
Jones, Helen  
Jones, Mr Kevan  
Jones, Susan Elan  
Kane, Mike  
Keeley, Barbara  
Kendall, Liz  
Kinnock, Stephen  
Kyle, Peter  
Lammy, rh Mr David  
Lavery, Ian  
Lewell-Buck, Mrs  
    Emma

Lewis, Clive  
Lewis, Mr Ivan  
Long Bailey, Rebecca  
Lucas, Caroline  
Lucas, Ian C.  
Lynch, Holly  
Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
Madders, Justin  
Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
Malhotra, Seema  
Mann, John  
Marris, Rob  
Maskell, Rachael  
Matheson, Christian  
McCarthy, Kerry  
McDonagh, Siobhain  
McDonald, Andy  
McDonnell, rh John  
McFadden, rh Mr  
    Pat  
McGovern, Alison  
McInnes, Liz  
McMahon, Jim  
Meale, Sir Alan  
Mearns, Ian  
Miliband, rh Edward  
Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
Morden, Jessica  
Mulholland, Greg  
Murray, Ian  
Nandy, Lisa  
Onn, Melanie  
Onwurah, Chi  
Osamor, Kate  
Owen, Albert  
Paisley, Ian  
Pearce, Teresa  
Perkins, Toby  
Phillips, Jess  
Phillipson, Bridget  
Pound, Stephen  
Powell, Lucy  
Pugh, John  
Qureshi, Yasmin  
Rayner, Angela  
Reeves, Rachel  
Reynolds, Emma  
Reynolds, Jonathan

Rimmer, Marie  
Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
Rotheram, Steve  
Saville Roberts, Liz  
Shannon, Jim  
Sharma, Mr Virendra  
Sheerman, Mr Barry  
Sherriff, Paula  
Shuker, Mr Gavin  
Siddiq, Tulip  
Skinner, Mr Dennis  
Slaughter, Andy  
Smith, rh Mr  
    Andrew  
Smith, Angela  
Smith, Cat  
Smith, Nick  
Smyth, Karin  
Spellar, rh Mr John  
Stevens, Jo  
Streeting, Wes  
Stringer, Graham  
Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
Tami, Mark  
Thomas, Mr Gareth  
Thornberry, Emily  
Trickett, Jon  
Turley, Anna  
Turner, Karl  
Twigg, Derek  
Twigg, Stephen  
Umunna, Mr Chuka  
Vaz, Valerie  
West, Catherine  
Whitehead, Dr Alan  
Williams, Hywel  
Williams, Mr Mark  
Wilson, Phil  
Winnick, Mr David  
Woodcock, John  
Wright, Mr Iain  
Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
**Thangam Debonnaire and**  
**Jeff Smith**

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel  
Afriyie, Adam  
Aldous, Peter  
Amess, Sir David  
Andrew, Stuart  
Ansell, Caroline  
Argar, Edward  
Atkins, Victoria  
Bacon, Mr Richard  
Baker, Mr Steve  
Baldwin, Harriett  
Barclay, Stephen  
Barwell, Gavin  
Bebb, Guto  
Bellingham, Sir  
    Henry  
Benyon, Richard  
Beresford, Sir Paul  
Berry, Jake  
Berry, James  
Bingham, Andrew

Blackman, Bob  
Blunt, Crispin  
Bone, Mr Peter  
Borwick, Victoria  
Bottomley, Sir Peter  
Bradley, rh Karen  
Brady, Mr Graham  
Brazier, Mr Julian  
Bridgen, Andrew  
Brine, Steve  
Brokenshire, rh  
    James  
Bruce, Fiona  
Buckland, Robert  
Burns, Conor  
Burns, rh Sir Simon  
Burrowes, Mr David  
Burt, rh Alistair  
Cairns, rh Alun  
Cartledge, James  
Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Choqe, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clark, rh Greg  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duddridge, James  
 Duncan, rh Sir Alan  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr  
 Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Francois, rh Mr Mark  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, rh Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matt

Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr  
 Ranil  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, rh Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew  
 Mordaunt, Penny

Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr  
 Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 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  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline

Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, rh Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, John  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr  
 John  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wright, rh Jeremy

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Chris Heaton-Harris and**  
**Christopher Pincher**

*Question accordingly negated.*

*Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 31(2)),*  
 That the proposed words be there added.

*Question agreed to.*

*The Deputy Speaker declared the main Question, as*  
*amended, to be agreed to (Standing Order No. 31(2)).*

*Resolved,*

That this House welcomes the Government's Spending Review settlement for health and social care, which ensures that the amount of money available to local authorities for adult social care services will rise significantly across the Parliament, and ensures that up to £3.5 billion more will be available by 2020; commends the work and dedication of those in the social care sector; and further welcomes the introduction by the Government of the social care precept which allows local authorities greater autonomy in making decisions about how they best meet their local communities' needs for social care.

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

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

#### CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Inquiries into Fatal Accidents and Sudden Deaths etc. (Scotland) Act 2016 (Consequential Provisions and Modifications) Order 2016, which was laid before this House on 13 October, be approved.—(*Mark Spencer.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### PETITION

#### Bank Services in Corwen

7.13 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): I am presenting a petition on behalf of the residents of Corwen and the neighbouring villages.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Corwen,

Declares that the loss of local branches of national banks is having a dramatic effect on local communities; further that it is leaving towns and villages cut off from local financial services; further that the loss of banking services in Corwen is forcing people to travel to other towns to use their banking services; and further that this is resulting in the reduction of visitors to Corwen and a decline in income for local retail businesses.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to develop a community banking system incorporating local government legislation in order to ensure residents of local villages and towns such as Corwen continue to have access to a bank or financial services.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001978]

## Prison Officer Safety

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Mark Spencer.)*

7.14 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): What a pleasure it is to be here under your command, Madam Deputy Speaker. This debate on prison officer safety is rather well timed given what has been on our TV screens and in our newspapers. Before I start, I want to thank all those who work in the Prison Service—prison officers, managers, governors—and the numerous organisations, both charitable and voluntary, that support the service to ensure that prisoners have a chance to rehabilitate and that we are kept safe. We owe them a huge debt. I also praise the prison officers who serve at The Verne immigration centre, which was a prison until quite recently and is now under the auspices of the Home Office.

I welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement about the recruitment of 2,500 more prison officers by the end of 2018 and her aim for every offender to have a dedicated prison officer providing regular one-to-one support. More officers will certainly help to deter attacks on them, which have risen worryingly over recent years. In the 12 months to June 2016, there were nearly 6,000 assaults on staff—up 43% on the previous year. Of those, 700 assaults—an increase of 20% on the previous year—are regarded as serious and required hospital treatment. A recruitment drive is most welcome, as I have said, but the problem of retaining staff remains. In 2015, of the 2,250 officers who were recruited, only 440 were retained. We must remember that there are 7,000 fewer officers now than in 2010, when the prison population was about 2,500 lower.

The recent action by prison officers, which I do not support, was driven by a genuine concern for their safety—I am certain of that. We must take note of that. If we do not, not only we will fail to recruit sufficient new officers, but the exercise will be a complete waste of money as they all leave. Understaffing is the root cause of their discontent. Savings have understandably been made in the public sector, and I have voted for such savings on many occasions, so I do not condemn the Government for making the savings necessary for us to learn to live within our means. However, if we make savings, we must note the consequences and act if they are unintentional and serious. My next point refers to the prison estate in general, not to the young offender institution in my constituency, which is excellently led by James Lucas, a former soldier with whom I do a lot of business. The increased workload, lower morale, poor leadership in some cases, a higher retirement age—more on that in a minute—and an increased risk of being assaulted have all contributed to the problems we see today. Frankly, who can blame the officers?

I touched on the pension age and the necessity for prison officers to work until 68, which does affect their safety. Let me explain. I witnessed a demonstration laid on by prison officers of how to remove a troublesome prisoner—on this occasion, actually a prison officer—from his cell. The officers were equipped with all the necessary protective gear and they went in to remove this troublesome fellow. He did not react violently. He simply stood in his cell, not co-operating and using his weight and strength

[Richard Drax]

not to move. Those three beefy officers eventually got the man out, but it took them an awfully long time. I am 58 and in reasonably good nick, but I am not so sure that I would be able to drag someone out of a prison cell in 10 years' time, particularly if they were behaving violently or were under the influence of drugs, as they often are. I ask the Minister to respond to this particular point about the physical demands on a prison officer when they get to the age of 60 and above.

I have also seen pictures of riots, which were taken on the body cameras that the Government are introducing—again, I entirely commend what they are trying to do—to ensure that evidence can be gathered. In addition, the cameras are a deterrent, because the prisoners who might offend know that they are being filmed and therefore that they will be found guilty if caught. I have faced crowds in Northern Ireland, but I was always surrounded by guardsmen armed to the teeth. In one particular riot, I think one prison officer had a shield, but the rest were caught out at quite short notice. Two of them were female prison officers, and they were facing a baying crowd of thugs, who were really geared up and were looking for that moment of weakness. Had those prison officers shown that weakness, I am convinced that 10 to 15 of the prisoners would have pounced, and those prison officers would have been seriously hurt.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I sought the hon. Gentleman's permission to intervene before this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The £1.3 billion investment that the Government have offered over the next five years is good news, but there is a short-term issue to take care of, which the hon. Gentleman has outlined very well. Does he agree that, when it comes to discussions on safety, they must take place with counterparts in Northern Ireland, and that those who have experience of how to deal with difficult cases across the prison system in Northern Ireland over some 30 to 40 years could help, as there is a lot of knowledge that could be used for the betterment of the service in Northern Ireland? I make that point as a careful and gentle suggestion to the Minister.

**Richard Drax:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. Like anything in life, those who are trying to achieve something turn to those who have experienced it. They listen to their experiences and, if they are wise and if the advice is good, they will adopt it. Perhaps the Minister will respond on that particular point.

I pay tribute to the officers who faced this baying crowd. They stood their ground and maintained control of the prison. As it happened, the most thuggish of the men, who was bouncing up and down on the wire netting that was there to prevent people from falling, actually fell off the end of the netting and damaged his ankle. It was extraordinary. At the point that the ring leader went down, calm returned almost instantly. It just shows how little things have to be affected in a prison before these very brave men and women are faced with some very unpleasant experiences.

I have a question for the Minister. Can the Government—I would be very grateful for an answer to this—bring prison officers under the same retirement age as the uniformed services to reflect the occasional

physical testing characteristics of the job? There is no doubt that the presence of drugs in prison is contributing to attacks on officers. I welcome the Secretary of State's assurance that dealing with drugs is high on her agenda. Spice is the modern curse in prison. It fuels violence against officers because of its mind and behaviour altering effects. Worse, it exacerbates existing mental health issues, personality disorders and behavioural issues, causing unpredictable bouts of violence. This point was picked up by the report of the Independent Monitoring Boards for the year to March 2015. Under problems, it says:

“The widespread and apparently un-checkable presence of so-called ‘legal highs’ or ‘Spice’ on the wings. This is leading to trading, debt, bullying of more vulnerable prisoners and their families, criminal networking and gang activity, violence and unpredictable behaviour among prisoners.”

That of course has a knock-on effect on those who are guarding them. Dogs are one solution, but in my constituency the young offender institution has only one dog, and, as we all know, much as we love them they cannot work seven days a week. They have to be rested.

More dogs may be a solution. Perhaps the Minister can expand on that. I believe someone mentioned that the number of dogs would be increased.

Spice is endemic and is seemingly brought into prisons via drones and social visits, thrown over prison walls, brought in by new or returning prisoners and, apparently, by soaking letters in it. As I said, drugs lead to bullying and debt, increasing the risk to both prisoners and officers.

Another way of improving safety for officers is to hold more regular searches. As I understand it—perhaps the Minister can help me—they used to happen once a month or thereabouts. Searches are more irregular now because in order to search one cell, officers have to shut down a whole wing, and they do not necessarily have the resources to hand when that needs to be done. A lockdown of an entire wing in one prison recently revealed a range of illegal goods.

More officers would reduce the need to lock prisoners in their cells for longer than is necessary. The report from Winchester prison today underscores that point. Taking part in purposeful activity would counteract the inevitable resentment that builds up behind a locked cell door. A fairly treated prisoner—I am not all flowery on this, but I believe that prisoners should be treated fairly—is less likely to resort to violence.

There are concerns about whether the courts take assaults on prison officers as seriously as they take assaults on police officers, despite the fact that, as I understand it, both have equal standing and protection under the law when on duty. In early 2015 a joint protocol was published on the appropriate handling of crimes in prisons, but the issue remains a very real one. Will the Minister review the range of sentences handed down to prisoners who assault prison officers? Anyone who assaults a prison officer or any other public servant in uniform should face an automatic custodial sentence. A strong deterrent and message is needed, and a tougher stance should be taken by the courts. Anything that the Government can do to assist me and other colleagues in the House, and certainly prison officers, would be helpful.

Let me highlight that point with two brief examples. In the first case, a prisoner who was due to be released the next day “potted” a female prison officer. “Potting”—if

there is anyone in the Gallery, I apologise for being so crude—involves urine and excrement being thrown over an officer. It is disgusting, demeaning and outrageous. That prisoner was released the next day, when he was arrested for assault, fined £200 and given a suspended sentence. That is farcical. In another case, another female officer was “potted” and the prisoner received a mere 21 extra days on his sentence. That officer was then goaded and teased by the prisoner when she returned to work. Again, that is unacceptable. Perhaps because “potting” causes no physical damage, the courts tend to be more lenient, but the effect on officers who have been subjected to such disgusting humiliation is traumatic, and offenders should be dealt with harshly. I would be grateful if the Minister commented on that.

The prison population is becoming more violent, with the number of those sentenced for violent offences rising by 30% in the past 10 years. Officers are clearly struggling to cope on many occasions, and their concerns have been expressed in a number of ways to me personally and by taking the action which I did not agree with, but which many of us understand. A survey of Prison Officer Association members in 2014 found that the demands of the job are particularly high and support from managers is low. I am not commenting, as I said, on any prisons in my constituency, but we had a saying in the Army that there are no bad soldiers, only bad officers. I suspect that that is true in every walk of life and I am sure it applies in the case of prison staff.

I do not know whether the Minister is prepared to comment on what control is kept over managers and governors to ensure that prisons are managed properly. Let me give a tiny example from a prison I visited some time ago. I said to one of the prison officers, “I’m sure the manager comes round every day with his board and pencil and says, ‘Bob, good morning. It’s your wife’s birthday. Happy birthday to her. Your little son is 10 today. How marvellous. I hope you have a very nice day. If there are any problems, do come and see me.’” This officer’s jaw hit the floor, and he said, “I don’t think so, Richard. That is not exactly how it works.” As it happened, he had not seen his governor for some time. That is a tiny example, and I do not know, but I would say that the governor was not in touch with the men and women he was commanding.

The warning signs are therefore clear, and we would be irresponsible to ignore them. In my humble view, the line that used to exist between prison officer and prisoner has become increasingly blurred. The forgotten army, which is how I often refer to prison officers, needs our support, and we owe them and all who work in our prisons our thanks and a duty of care.

7.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Sam Gyimah):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) on securing tonight’s debate. I start by joining him in saying that our prison officers are indeed brave, but the work they do—important work that keeps the public safe, but also helps to turn around offenders—often goes unnoticed, and it is worth putting on record that we do value them immensely.

I am determined to improve prison safety for our prison officers and for prisoners themselves. Recent events, including incidents at HMP Bedford and HMP

Pentonville, emphasise how important it is that we act now on prison safety and security. In my hon. Friend’s constituency, prisoners at HMP Portland have displayed significant levels of violence against staff, so I would like to echo his concerns, and I reassure him that the Government are taking decisive action to tackle this serious problem—to stabilise it in the short term and to overhaul the system to deliver reforms of longer-term benefit.

I thank my hon. Friend for his support in the House yesterday in condemning the actions of the Prison Officers Association and stressing that strike action was neither constructive for prison officers nor safe for prisoners. I welcome the POA’s decision to stop its unlawful industrial action and the fact that prison officers have returned to work. That incident does not, of course, diminish the principle that underpinned the POA’s action: that prison officer safety is a key challenge and concern.

A point was raised about the lessons we can learn from Northern Ireland. I welcome that point, and I will take it on board. The Department is determined to learn lessons wherever it can to deal with the different challenges across the prison system, be it safety, security or turning prisoners around, but also extremism. So I welcome that point, and I would like to engage directly with the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) to take the issue forward.

The levels of violence our prison system has seen over the past five years are unacceptable. There were over 23,000 assaults in the year to June 2016, and over 3,000 of those were against staff. Rising violence against the very officers who devote their lives to public safety must be tackled as a matter of urgency, and that is what the Government are doing.

As we set out in our new “Prison Safety and Reform” White Paper, the Government will be investing over £100 million to recruit an additional 2,500 staff across the estate by the end of 2018. Prison officers do a vital job. I want them to benefit from the improvements we are making on the frontline and to safety to change prisoners’ lives for the better.

We recognise the challenge faced in recruiting an extra 2,500 staff, so we are launching a number of initiatives, including a new apprenticeship programme to recruit more people. We are about to launch an “Army officer to prison officer” recruitment programme, and we also have a programme to encourage the brightest and best graduates to become prison officers.

Of course, those things will take time, but we are making serious and significant progress, including with the 400 extra officers that we have pledged to recruit by March 2017 for our most challenging prisons. We are on track to deliver and meet that target.

Increased staff numbers will give prison officers more time, as my hon. Friend has said, to turn around the lives of prisoners and ensure that they turn against criminality and violence in increasing numbers. Nearly half of all offenders who leave prison go on to commit crime within a year. Investment will provide the capacity for prison officers to play a dedicated officer role, engaging with about six prisoners on a one-to-one basis. They will build constructive relationships with prisoners, listening to their frustration, defusing tension and ultimately reducing the level of violence.

[Mr Sam Gyimah]

Staffing is only one component of the challenge that we face in our prisons, where there is a game-changing situation involving drugs, phones and drones. The rise in the use and trade of psychoactive substances has been a game changer for the Prison Service. Along with phones, their use and trade drives a destructive cycle of bribery, debt, violence and self-harm. Assaults against staff have increased in that context, so it is essential that we get those issues under control, in tandem with new staffing approaches.

**Richard Drax:** What can we do physically to stop those drugs getting into prisons? Apparently the situation is endemic across the country. We cannot search people—I do not think that we have the machines to identify the drugs—so how do we stop them?

**Mr Gyimah:** That is a very good question. The initial challenge posed by the new psychoactive substances—otherwise known as legal highs—was that there was no test that could detect them. It was, therefore, very easy for people not only to get them into prison, but to make them up from a number of components. We now have a test that can identify the drugs so we have introduced mandatory drug testing, but we are also going further to tackle the criminality that drives the smuggling of the drugs into prisons. We will invest £3 million in a new, prison-wide intelligence and search capability that will allow us not only to gather intelligence across the system about which criminal gangs are behind the drugs and trying to get them into our prisons, but to stop them.

Tackling the use of mobile phones is also vital, because, while some prisoners want access to them in order to contact friends and family, a vast number of prisoners use them for criminal purposes, including arranging a time for drugs to come in and telling someone where to send the drone. Dealing with the illicit smuggling of mobile phones into our prisons is absolutely key. Like drones, it is a technological problem, and I believe that technology is the way to deal with it. That is why we are working with the mobile network operators to find a way to prevent mobile phones from working in our prisons, and with drone manufacturers to create no-fly zones across our prison estate.

My hon. Friend specifically mentioned violence against staff. Alongside measures on drones, drugs and phones, it is essential that we increase staff confidence in the prison system. That starts with achieving swift justice when assaults occur. My hon. Friend and I share that concern. We are rolling out body-worn cameras across the estate in order to give staff added confidence, while also supporting bringing timely and effective trials for prisoners when necessary. We will work with other parts of the criminal justice system, including the National Crime Agency and the police, to improve the evidence-collection process, to ensure a “right first time” culture. By clamping down on staff assaults, we will help break the vicious cycle of violence committed by some of our most challenging prisoners.

My hon. Friend mentioned the retirement age of prison officers, which ties into yesterday’s action. The Government are actively engaged with the Prison Officers

Association in negotiations around pay, pensions, the retirement age, retention and health and safety. That is why we were surprised by the action of the POA yesterday. We have an outstanding offer to the POA as of last Friday, and the POA is yet to respond to it. I believe that by coming back to the negotiating table, we will be able to discuss these issues to secure the safety of officers and to ensure that the jobs in their profession are as well rewarded as they obviously should be.

The Secretary of State and I have made it clear over recent weeks that we are taking decisive and urgent action to improve prison safety. The safety and security measures in our White Paper will work alongside key measures such as the £1.3 billion that we are investing to regenerate the old Victorian estate and reforms to empower prison governors. We have a genuine commitment to alleviating violence against our staff, which we cannot ignore in the current context.

My hon. Friend mentioned prison management, and I believe that our reform programme will really help in that context by empowering governors and giving them control over their budgets. That will enable them to make decisions about the employment, education and training of prisoners. It will also enable them to deploy staff in a way that best allows them to deliver a prison regime that not only provides safety and security, but turns prisoners around. Prison governors will be real managers and leaders of their shop. At the moment, too much comes from Whitehall. We want to give prison governors responsibility and freedom, with, obviously, the right accountability framework. With that, we will see the change in management culture that my hon. Friend pointed to.

My hon. Friend mentioned the prison population, which comes up in numerous debates. Prison has to be the last resort for anyone who has committed a crime. Our job is to make sure that where people have committed an offence and are sentenced, there is capacity in the system for our prisons to deliver on the orders of the court. I do not believe that the way to deal with the prison population issue is to let prisoners out arbitrarily, especially considering the impact that that would have on victims and families. I believe that the best way to deal with the population in the long term is to cut reoffending. By reducing reoffending, we will reduce the prison population.

I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured that the Government are pressing forward with these measures at great speed and intensity, because, like him, we value the admirable work that our prison officers do. We want them to benefit from the improvements we are making, both on the frontline and to safety and security, which will ultimately help them to change prisoners’ lives for the better.

Prison safety is an integral part of the health of the system in which prison officers operate. As I have said, we encourage the POA to come back to the negotiating table so that we can work together to tackle the safety challenges that concern us all.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.43 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 16 November 2016*

[MR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE *in the Chair*]

## Centenary of the Balfour Declaration

9.30 am

**Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to have secured this debate. It is particularly fitting as just a few days ago, on Tuesday 2 November, we marked the beginning of a year of events leading to the centenary of the Balfour declaration—one of the most defining moments in the UK's shared history with Israel.

On that November day back in 1917, a Conservative Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, gave the official approval of His Majesty's Government to the Zionist movement's aspiration for Jewish self-determination. That paved the way for the creation of the state of Israel in their historic homeland following centuries of exile and persecution around the world. This landmark letter, comprised of just three paragraphs, has been the subject of intense historical debate right up to, and I am sure including, today.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): The British Government of that day could well be accused of duplicity. Not only were they issuing the Balfour declaration, but they had guaranteed, one way or another, to the Sharif of Mecca and other Arab leaders, that the Arabs would be allowed to have a homeland, so they were either duplicitous or incompetent in 1917.

**Caroline Ansell**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. My understanding is that that challenge has been made, but was refuted strongly by Churchill back in the day.

This landmark letter, comprising just three paragraphs and the subject of our debate today, sets out that aspiration for a Jewish homeland. I am proud that our country supported the establishment of that national home, and I am also proud of the strength of the UK-Israeli relationship. Our partnership in trade, technology, medicine and academia, and our shared values, have flourished in the 68 years of Israel's young life.

In his letter, Foreign Secretary Balfour pledged to Lord Rothschild, a leading member of British Jewry, that he would “view with favour”, and that His Majesty's Government endorsed,

“the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country”.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am glad that the hon. Lady read the letter through. Does she agree that the first part of that equation has been dealt with,

which is the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine—not, obviously, the whole of Palestine—and that perhaps concentration for the next immediate period should be on the second part, the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities, which clearly has not been achieved? That should be our priority.

**Caroline Ansell**: The hon. Gentleman's point is well made. Where we might disagree is on reasons why that second aspiration has not come to pass. What is really important about the letter, which has been contested, is that this non-binding Balfour declaration was swiftly endorsed and enshrined in binding agreements ratified by the international community in the San Remo resolution and the Sèvres peace treaty, and was then ratified by all 51 countries of the League of Nations when the British mandate for Palestine was approved in 1922.

**Mark Field** (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Although we are living in a fast-changing world and no treaty at any time is entirely immutable, my hon. Friend, I and many of our colleagues present here today acknowledge the importance—hopefully, the globally acknowledged importance—of the recognition of an Israeli homeland. Although I accept that there is still work to do to ensure that every aspect of the Balfour declaration is put in place, and we will hopefully play a part in that work in the decades to come, it is equally important to recognise that Israel has been a success story and its right to exist should be recognised globally.

**Caroline Ansell**: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reaffirmation that, although Britain led in this regard, that shared, stated intention to see a homeland returned to the Jewish people was supported across the world.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On the subject of leadership, does the hon. Lady agree that, given Britain's prominent historical role, it needs to play a very active part in trying to find a solution and ensuring that a two-state solution is implemented?

**Caroline Ansell**: Indeed I do.

The League of Nations, the precursor to the United Nations, formally recognised, and this is critical to what follows,

“the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine”

and

“the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country”.

Through its use of the term “reconstituting”, the international community formally recognised the pre-existing ties of the Jewish people to their homeland, in which there had been a continuous Jewish presence for millennia.

A hundred years on and Israel today is a multiracial, multi-ethnic democracy where Arabs, Druze and other minorities are guaranteed equal rights under law. Israel's 1.7 million-strong Arab minority—around 20% of the local population—participates fully in Israel's political system, and there are currently 17 Israeli Arab members in the 120-seat Knesset. Israeli Arabs serve as university professors, senior police and army officers and heads of hospital departments, and an Arab judge sits in the country's Supreme Court. Opponents of Zionism and the state of Israel have freedom of speech and are

[Caroline Ansell]

permitted to form political organisations within the country. In fact, Israel is the only country in the world whose Parliament has Members advocating the destruction of the state. Elsewhere in the middle east, minority communities live in starkly different circumstances. The Christian community, for example, is in serious and dramatic decline across much of the middle east because of persecution and oppression, while in Israel Christians enjoy full rights and freedoms. Indeed, Christians make up the largest religious community in Israel after Jews and Muslims, and the holiest sites in Christianity are protected by Israel.

Britain and Israel have an enduring relationship shaped both by our historical ties and by our extensive co-operation and shared interests today. The Prime Minister recently described the relationship between our two countries as remaining

“as strong as ever, based not only on bilateral trade, scientific research and security co-operation, but the values we share, like freedom, democracy and tolerance.”

The value of bilateral trade in both directions over the past 10 years has increased by 60%, and in 2015 reached a record high of almost £6 billion.

**Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She is making an insightful speech but, on the point about trade, does she believe that there should be trade with the illegal settlements or with businesses that are located in the illegal settlements? I ask that particularly because the European Union has recently banned trade with businesses in the Crimea, which, as we know, is an illegally annexed land. Given that there are now 600,000 settlers living in the illegal settlements, and those settlements are clearly—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. We will have to have shorter interventions.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I apologise, Mr Chope. My question is—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. Will the hon. Gentleman resume his seat, please?

**Caroline Ansell:** On the point about settlements, we need to see a far bigger picture. We are looking to determine today, and in the hereafter, a peace deal whereby Israel and Palestine can live, co-exist, share, prosper and trade with one another. The hon. Gentleman, in focusing on that point, is perhaps neglecting the much bigger picture and the bigger ambition: we want free trade across those borders and security for both peoples and all businesses operating in the region.

**Mark Field:** I was very pleased with what my hon. Friend had to say about co-operation between Christians, particularly in this country, and the Jewish community. Does she recognise that as well as the trade to which she refers, a huge amount of incredibly important co-operation on security and intelligence is happening between our two countries to make the middle east and, hopefully, the world a safer place in the years to come?

**Caroline Ansell:** I recognise the great merit in what my right hon. Friend says. In particular, the new relationships in that part of the world—with the peace

deals with Egypt and Jordan—are securing much greater stability in the region and, courtesy of that technological advancement, greater security across the world.

**Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab):** The hon. Lady rightly draws attention to the much better relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Is not the key to a sustainable peace that those who are involved in negotiations commit themselves to full recognition of the state of Israel, securely positioned alongside a Palestinian state with international guarantees, and a rejection of the groups that campaign against the existence of Israel? Should not all those who participate in this debate make clear their commitment to that as the starting point of the process?

**Caroline Ansell:** The right hon. Gentleman’s point is so very well made; that is the starting point and the journey. We would do well to preface all our speeches with the intention that we want to see both sides come together and engage in peace talks for the peace and security of both countries, the region and the world.

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** Would we not have a two-state solution today if the armies of five Arab states had not invaded the newly independent declared state of Israel in 1948? It is really from that decision that the Palestinians lost their allocated share and their homeland.

**Caroline Ansell:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. The UN-sponsored partition plan for Palestine in 1947 was a very significant missed opportunity. How different might the region be today and how many lives might have been spared—because there is suffering and loss on both sides—if the Arab leadership had taken up that UN-sponsored partition plan back in the day.

Let me reprise Britain’s ties with Israel and how we feel the benefit of that relationship. Consider, for example, that one in six generic prescription drugs issued by the NHS comes from an Israeli pharmaceutical company. Indeed, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), announced a few weeks ago that, without these supplies from Israel,

“significant shortages of some medicines important for patient health”

would be likely. Brexit provides us with an opportunity to negotiate a new trade deal with Israel, and I welcome the fact that the Government have already confirmed their determination to secure a deal and further strengthen our trading relationship.

**Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con):** Does Israel’s participation in Horizon 2020 indicate, post-Brexit, that the European Union will still be open not only to Israel, but to Britain in the really important area of scientific research?

**Caroline Ansell:** Indeed it does; I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Although the UK’s relationship and ties with Israel are strong and we see Israel’s contribution to our economy, its contribution to the world should also be recognised at this landmark moment. Israel has defied the challenges posed by an arid climate, a small population and security

threats to make significant contributions to the advancement of the world. Israeli inventions have transformed the way we live our lives. The algorithm for sending emails, mobile phone technology, technology for anti-virus software, instant messaging and the USB flash drive were all developed in Israel. It is little surprise that so many multinational tech giants have established R and D facilities in Israel. Apple, Windows, Intel, HP, Google and many more all have a presence in a country that is the size of Wales.

From helping refugees in Lesbos to fighting Ebola in west Africa, Israeli aid teams are a common and welcome sight for countries in their time of need. On my visit to Israel last year, I had the great pleasure of visiting Save a Child's Heart, which is an extraordinary project that provides life-saving surgery for children with cognitive heart defects. The lives of children throughout the developing world have been saved by Israeli doctors. There is much to recognise, value and celebrate.

**Andy Slaughter:** Did the hon. Lady speak to Palestinians and see what is happening in the west bank? Next year is also the 50th anniversary of a brutal military occupation of someone else's territory. Until that key point is resolved, we will not have two peoples living together in peace.

**Caroline Ansell:** I had the opportunity during that visit to meet Palestinians, business leaders and property developers. I saw a development at Rawabi, the likes of which I have never seen before in its scale, scope, vision and ambition. A whole city is rising out of the ground. I have never seen anything so truly astonishing. That place, being built by Palestinians for Palestinians, with 40,000 homes looking to be delivered, is a really positive vision for what the future could look like.

Events to mark the declaration's centenary began earlier this month and will continue until the 100th anniversary in November 2017. Jewish communal and Israel advocacy organisations have launched an official Balfour 100 campaign, providing helpful educational resources, and will be hosting a series of events. The Prime Minister has expressed her desire to mark the occasion, as has the Minister, and I thank him for his remarks.

However, Israel does not live in peace and security and the Palestinians have not acceded to their own recognised state. As my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) said earlier, how different things might have been if the Arab leadership, back in 1947, had adopted that UN partition plan. The region could look very different today, with two prosperous states—one Arab, one Jewish—working together and more faithfully reflecting the Balfour aspiration that the civil and religious rights of all be safeguarded.

Over the years, proposals have been rejected for a two-state solution, including, in recent decades, at Camp David at the turn of the century, and more recently, in 2008. Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005 in an effort to bring more momentum to the peace process. Gifted with a highly educated population and a very beautiful Mediterranean coastline, it has been said that Gaza had the potential to be the Singapore of the east, but rather than being able to seize that opportunity, the Islamist terror group, Hamas, has committed Gazan civilians to ongoing rounds of violence.

**John Glen (Salisbury) (Con):** When I asked a Palestinian official why several thousand greenhouses had been destroyed during that period, I received the reply, "We were very stupid to do so." That great opportunity was squandered. Does my hon. Friend agree that that was surprising?

**Caroline Ansell:** Yes, indeed, that was an opportunity. I think, with the benefit of hindsight, how different things might have been.

Instead of participating in face-to-face talks, the Palestinian Authority have chosen to pursue unilateral measures in the international arena, but unilateralism is the rejection of the peace process, not a means to revive it. Worse yet, the Palestinians remain divided, with fierce internal rivalry between Hamas and Fatah. Following the recent cancellation of the long overdue local elections, it does not seem that the two camps will come together anytime soon.

**Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very difficult to have sensible negotiations on a two-state solution if the other side does not turn up or, indeed, recognise the existence of the other side?

**Caroline Ansell:** My hon. Friend highlights two essential, beautifully simple truths: that there must be mutual recognition and there must be direct talks. Without those, the process cannot move forward. I hope that in this landmark time, the call from us all, with one voice, is to urge both sides to come together again to take up talks.

As the engineers of the Balfour declaration, it is even more important for our country to work with both parties to return to the peace talks. Therefore, I ask the Minister what recent discussions he has had with his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts on the return to direct negotiations, and what the prospects are for the resumption of peace talks without preconditions.

The Palestinian people deserve to live their lives in peace and prosperity. As I said previously, during my time in the west bank, I visited the remarkable new city of Rawabi, which offers up such hope for a better future. Very recently—during the summer in fact—new partnerships have been coming forward. At the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, two new programmes are bringing Israelis and Palestinians together. The lead professor said:

"As a leading academic and research institution, we are committed to advancing science for the benefit of all people. Through this new partnership with the British government, Palestinian graduate students are already contributing to world-leading research at the Hebrew University, and we are delighted to have them with us. This program not only advances science, but through it sends a message of hope and friendship, and of the importance of working together to find solutions that improve the health of our communities." Such projects bring hope and show what can be achieved.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend accept that the Palestinian people have been badly let down by their leadership? When I spoke to the Palestine Liberation Organisation about duplicating Rawabi, it told me that it did not want anything to do with the project because it involved the private sector. That is a disgraceful approach to a very significant project in the region.

**Caroline Ansell:** Yes, indeed. I understand that much negotiation was done to bring the project to light without the blessing of the leadership, which perhaps pulls back from wanting the world to see a more prosperous Palestine.

Although leaders need to step up, it is through relationships between everyday people from both communities that a real and lasting peace will ultimately be established. There have been no direct peace talks for several years now, but there have been some recent signs of progress on both sides. We should welcome the fact that Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has underlined his commitment to restarting peace negotiations without preconditions, and that PA President Mahmoud Abbas attended the funeral of former Israeli President Shimon Peres in September. Recent polling has shown that there is still an appetite for a two-state solution among Palestinians and Israelis; the people.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): We have found in Northern Ireland and other locations across the globe that, until we get to the point at which those who advocate violence or give it quiet endorsement accept that there is no point and that violence is totally counter-productive in reaching a successful conclusion, it is exceptionally difficult to arrive at, in this instance, a two-state solution. Does the hon. Lady agree that that is the case?

**Caroline Ansell:** The hon. Gentleman is right in everything he says, but peace is possible and there is a precedent for peace in the lasting peace deals with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.

In conclusion, there is much in the past century to value, recognise and celebrate, and there is much more to which we need to aspire to ensure that the peoples of both communities can continue to live and prosper.

9.55 am

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing the debate and on a good set of opening remarks.

This debate gives us the opportunity to reflect on the unique contribution of this country to the creation of the modern state of Israel. There is much to be said about the historical significance of the Balfour declaration, but I will focus my remarks on its significance in the context of today's stark realities. We are seeing a serious and concerning resurgence of anti-Semitism globally, which more often than not is inextricably linked to a hostility towards the state of Israel. In many quarters, Zionism has become a toxic word that is equated, by some, with the oppression of the Palestinian people. In the recent past, there was a global campaign by Israel's strongest critics to falsely equate Zionism with racism.

Although it is true—and we should make this point—that some people inappropriately label any criticism of the Israeli state as anti-Semitism, it is also true that hostility towards Israel and Zionism too often consists of language and imagery that crosses a line and becomes anti-Semitism—or, to give it its true name, Jew hatred. This is the case among some on the left in this country including, sadly, a small minority in my party. Such hostility has led to a significant flight of Jews from France, and is a growing problem in many European countries. Too often, anti-Semitism is viewed as a second-

class form of racism, and justified or legitimised by many who claim to be staunch anti-racism campaigners, but who abhor Israel and attack Zionism.

It is chilling that, 100 years on from the Balfour declaration, Marine Le Pen has a serious prospect of power in France, and the President-elect of the United States has appointed someone with well-documented anti-Semitic views to a senior position in his forthcoming Administration. Incidentally—it is important to put this on the record—it is equally chilling that misogyny, homophobia and Islamophobia are trivialised as just part of the rough and tumble of an election campaign, as though women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, Muslims, Mexicans and other minority communities can simply move on, the morning after an election, and that the anger, fear and insecurity for many citizens in a country that prides itself on being the world's leading liberal democracy should be relegated to a mere footnote in history. That would be the worst kind of double standard.

No serious attempt to tackle contemporary anti-Semitism can duck the Zionism question. All too often, those who talk about tackling anti-Semitism do not want to recognise that fact. I raised that point forcefully in my direct representations to the leader of my party and Shami Chakrabarti as part of their recent inquiry. Zionism is the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in their own state—a right to self-determination that many of Israel's fiercest critics demonstrate for on behalf of many other minority communities now around the world.

It is true that a small minority demand, in the name of Zionism, a greater Israel, which means the expansion of her current borders, but that is not the Zionism of the overwhelming majority. I passionately support a two-state solution, which means a viable Palestinian state and opposition to settlement expansion by Israel. I have profound differences with aspects of the current Israeli Government's policies, but I am proud to be a staunch supporter of the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in the state of Israel—a right supported by the United Nations in 1947 and enshrined by full recognition in 1949.

That right is in the finest traditions of the Labour party and many socialists who were the pioneers of the modern state of Israel. It was the British Labour party that led the way in supporting the right of Jews to have a homeland in Palestine. Three months prior to the adoption of the Balfour declaration, Labour's stated policy was:

“Palestine should be set free from the harsh and oppressive government of the Turk, in order that this country may form a free State under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish people as desire to do so may return and may work out their salvation free from interference by those of alien race or religion.”

The party's then leader, Arthur Henderson, said:

“The British Labour Party believes that the responsibility of the British people in Palestine should be fulfilled to the utmost of their power. It believes that these responsibilities may be fulfilled so as to ensure the economic prosperity, political autonomy and spiritual freedom of both the Jews and Arabs in Palestine.”

This debate is a welcome opportunity to challenge both the rewriting of history and the ignorance of history, a toxic combination that is fuelling so much of today's anti-Semitism.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend, like me, recognise and acknowledge that it was the Labour party that first expressed such support for the creation of the state of Israel and advanced the Balfour declaration? The Labour party went on to re-establish and recommit its support 11 times in the months and years that followed.

**Mr Lewis:** My hon. Friend is right. That is a historical fact. The reason for repeating that point is that there are some who talk about a two-state solution, which she and I support, but whose rhetoric and language often appear to be about a one-state solution—and that state is not the state of Israel. Her intervention is an accurate reflection of history, and it is important to make that point in the debate that often rages in our party. It is important to clarify the difference between the two, because people are saying that they want two states when they really want one state. That too often appears to be the language and rhetoric.

This timely debate has given us an opportunity to debate something that is incredibly important, particularly because of the impact in contemporary Britain, in Europe and across the world. To be clear, Zionists have no right to seek exemption for Israel from legitimate criticism of the actions of her Government or to brand those who engage in such criticism as anti-Semitic. Equally, some of Israel's fiercest critics must not be allowed to get away with the delegitimisation of Israel through the rewriting of history, which seeks to deny the legal and moral basis of the Jewish people's right to self-determination in their own state. It is entirely consistent and morally right both to support and celebrate the Balfour declaration and to strongly and passionately support a two-state solution that includes a viable state for the Palestinians.

10.2 am

**Mrs Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) for securing it. I am a long-time friend of the state of Israel and am proud to be so. I am pleased to say that a significant number of my constituents have been in contact with me about taking part in this debate, and I welcome their input.

As my constituents point out in their emails to me, the Balfour declaration was the first official statement of recognition by a major foreign power of the right of the Jewish people to national self-determination, free and safe from persecution. The support that the British gave to the creation of a Jewish democratic state was a key stage in a process that eventually brought relief from two millennia of persecution and exile, as my hon. Friend so eloquently stated.

As we have heard, the Balfour declaration was subsequently ratified by all 51 countries of the League of Nations when the Mandate for Palestine was approved in 1922, recognising the historical connection of the Jewish people to Palestine and the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country. Over the years, many sought and found refuge after the holocaust and the expulsion of some 800,000 Jewish people from across the middle east and north Africa. Since its rebirth in 1948, Israel has sadly been attacked many times and

has repeatedly faced existential threats. Despite those threats, Israel is a liberal, pluralist democracy that is committed to working for a peaceful settlement with all its neighbours.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): Does the right hon. Lady agree that, despite all the rhetoric about talks or whatever, the people who suffer most greatly from those attacks are the men, women and children, especially the children?

**Mrs Villiers:** Yes. The hon. Gentleman makes an entirely valid point. As others have said, I fear that the Palestinians have often been let down by their leadership.

It is also important to recognise that Israel is a multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy in which Arabs, Druze and other non-Jewish minorities are guaranteed equal rights under the law. It was a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne that Christians enjoy full freedom of religion in Israel, unlike in almost any other part of the middle east. Unlike in many countries of the middle east, the rights of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are fully protected in Israel, which is something to celebrate. Of course, there are a famously independent-minded media in Israel and an equally independent judiciary, both of which are always willing to hold the Israeli Government to account.

This debate is an important opportunity to speak out against those organisations that use boycott campaigns to seek to delegitimise the state of Israel. The 12-month run-up to the centenary of this important declaration provides us with an opportunity to celebrate Israel's contribution to the global community. It is an opportunity to condemn the sorts of anti-Semitism that we have heard about this morning, and it is an opportunity to reflect on how to restart the peace process in the middle east.

Although hon. Members in this room may be divided on many issues, I am sure we can all unite in supporting efforts to deliver a negotiated peace settlement for Israel and the Palestinians. Throughout the build-up to this important centenary next year, I am sure there will be a strong focus on seeking to get those negotiations going once again, with a view to finally securing the two-state solution for which we have already heard such strong support among hon. Members this morning. We could then finally see a safe and secure Israel living beside a viable Palestinian state.

The centenary is also an opportunity to celebrate the bilateral relationship between the UK and Israel. Since its creation, the state of Israel has had an enduring partnership with our country that covers many areas, including trade, technology, science, medicine and academic research. Trade between our two countries is now at record highs. The UK is Israel's second-largest trading partner, with more than 300 Israeli companies operating in this country. We have already heard about British-Israeli co-operation in technology, which is facilitating significant numbers of business partnerships that support jobs in both countries in areas such as FinTech, cleantech, cyber-security and health. Israel is a world leader in medical research, particularly stem cell research. Research under way in Israel is giving hope to many people with debilitating diseases such as Parkinson's.

[Mrs Villiers]

The forthcoming centenary is an opportunity to further strengthen ties between our country and Israel in culture, trade and academic life. Of course, the Brexit decision opens up the opportunity of a trade deal. We should also use the forthcoming centenary to see whether we can make further progress towards a long-term peaceful settlement in the middle east, which continues to be a foreign policy priority for our Government.

I hope the Minister will reassure us on those points. Today's debate is a reminder of the significant role that the United Kingdom played in the creation of the state of Israel, and with that comes a continuing obligation to do all we can to support efforts to deliver a negotiated settlement so that we can finally see a peaceful outcome and a two-state solution in the middle east.

10.9 am

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I welcome this debate. I should perhaps declare that I am a patron of the Balfour Project and explain its purpose:

“The Balfour Project invites the British government and people to mark the centenary of the Balfour Declaration on 2nd November 2017 by...learning what the Balfour Declaration means for both Jews and Arabs...acknowledging that whilst a homeland for the Jewish people has been achieved, the promise to protect the rights of the Palestinian people has not yet been fulfilled...urging the people and elected representatives of the UK to take effective action to promote justice, security and peace for both peoples.”

I am sure Members will have noted that the Balfour Project is inviting the Government and people of Britain to mark the centenary. I understand why the Jewish community will want to celebrate the centenary of the Balfour declaration, which enabled the creation of the state of Israel; as someone who has family in Israel, I celebrate that too. Equally, I understand why the Palestinian people will want to grieve or lament on its centenary the failure of the British Government to protect the rights of the Palestinian people, and I will grieve and lament with the Palestinian people too. That is why the Balfour Project talks about “marking” the centenary.

The Balfour Project takes its educational role seriously. To help to inform British citizens of our historical role in that region, it has produced a film about the Balfour declaration, which was shown at an event I hosted in Westminster in May, and a booklet that supports the initiative.

**Mrs Villiers:** Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in condemning the meeting that his former party colleague Baroness Tonge hosted in the House of Lords, at which the discourse was anti-Semitic? Will he condemn that meeting and his former colleague?

**Tom Brake:** Of course I condemn that meeting. The right hon. Lady rightly described her as my former party colleague; I am pleased that she is no longer a party colleague.

**Bob Stewart:** As I understand it, there was no anti-Semitism from the bench at that meeting. It was a question asked from the audience that Baroness Tonge did not even hear. That meeting has been grossly misconstrued, and that is wrong.

**Tom Brake:** I was not present at the meeting either, but as I understand it the comment was made not by Baroness Tonge but by a person in the audience, and Baroness Tonge did not make a blunt statement to rebut it. However, the fact is that she is no longer a member of the Liberal Democrats.

It is our historical role in the region that led me to get involved in the Balfour Project. I had not forgotten the bitterness and anger felt towards the British by the young Palestinians I met some 10 years ago as part of an initiative from the organisation Initiatives of Change. They felt that we had a central role, both in the failure to deliver for the Palestinian people and in trying to ensure that that was now delivered.

How should the UK Government be celebrating, commemorating or marking the centenary? That is obvious. They should fully support any peace initiatives that seek to implement the two-state solution before time runs out. I hope Members will agree that there is a real risk that time will indeed run out. We know that the election of President Trump is unlikely to help with implementing a two-state solution. As far as I am aware, the only game in town, in terms of peace initiatives, is the one that the French are currently running. The Israeli Government have said that they believe the French plan “greatly harms the possibilities for advancing the peace process.” I wonder whether the Minister agrees with the Israeli Government on that score.

Will the Minister take this opportunity to express a difference of opinion with the Israeli Education Minister, who says that there is no two-state solution? As far as I am aware, the UK's position is that that is what our Government are seeking to implement, so I hope the Minister will challenge that statement from a senior Israeli Minister. Is the Government's position that they want to encourage the Israelis to engage with that initiative in the way that Abbas has? Will the Minister support proposals from that initiative that would lead to greater economic co-operation—that is an area in which Israelis and Palestinians can mutually benefit—or proposals to strengthen ties between Palestinian and Israeli civil society organisations, perhaps as a first step towards a more meaningful peace process?

The UK has a particular historical responsibility towards the Palestinian people. We failed to honour our promises nearly 100 years ago. We have a duty now to actively support the peace process and to secure a viable Palestinian state. That is what our Government must do—indeed, a number of Members have said today that they want the Government to do it. It will be the most effective and meaningful way of marking the Balfour declaration and would mean that in future years its anniversary could be celebrated by both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair):** Order. The wind-ups will start at 10.30 am. The shorter the speeches, the more Members we will be able to accommodate.

10.15 am

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope—I believe I will have that pleasure again in several weeks. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on introducing the debate in such a balanced way.

We should clearly be talking about the celebration of the centenary of the Balfour declaration. I take the point that the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) made, but the meeting that was held in the House of Lords under the auspices of the Palestinian Return Centre was a Balfour apology campaign. The President of the Palestinian state has sought to get Britain to apologise for the Balfour declaration and potentially to sue the British Government for it. That is the context in which we must put the debate.

I have had the opportunity to visit Israel, both as a tourist and with Conservative Friends of Israel. I have also visited Jordan and the west bank with the Palestinian Return Centre, to see both sides of the argument. The reality of life in Israel or the west bank is such that no one should really speak about that part of the world unless they have been there. Israel is the only country in the world in which someone can go to one side of it, see the other and know that they are surrounded by neighbours that want to destroy the state in its entirety. That, of course, leads to the reasons why Israel acts as it does.

We should celebrate the Balfour declaration, but the one element that was not put in it was the borders of the state of Israel. Had those borders been determined at the time, when Britain was drawing lines on maps in many other parts of the world, possibly we would not still be trying to reach the two-state solution that we talk about today. It took three years for the Balfour declaration to be accepted worldwide, but accepted it was. Israel has since had to endure the second world war; the Holocaust; the 1948 war of independence, when it was attacked by Arab states that sought to wipe Israel off the face of the planet on its inception; a war in '67, when it was invaded again; and a war in '71, when it was invaded. Yet Israel continues to exist.

During various discussions, we have heard about the Israeli Government's supposed intransigence. However, Israel has demonstrated that it will give land for peace. The unilateral withdrawal from Gaza left behind buildings and agricultural opportunities that could have been used by the Palestinian people but were just demolished or ignored. The result of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza has been more than 11,000 rockets descending from Gaza on to the state of Israel. If you were in that position, Mr Chope, you would react, and the Israeli Government have reacted.

We have also heard the reality of the situation in this country. Anti-Semitism is on the rise; it is often conflated with a belief that the state of Israel should not exist at all or with attacks on the Government of the state of Israel. We have to confront anti-Semitism wherever it rears its ugly head. We must ensure it is understood that it is unacceptable to express such views and that it is unacceptable that anyone in this country should have to suffer anti-Semitism.

We have already heard from several Members, particularly my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs Villiers), about Israel's contributions to the world through trade, security, medicine, technology and science. We should remember that Israel is the world's 10th biggest economy: it is a key trading partner of the UK's, and beyond. Once we leave the European Union, we will have great opportunities for continuing our trade under a new international trade agreement, and we have the chance to set that out clearly over the next two years.

One issue that has not been mentioned, but should be, is the plight of the Jewish people throughout the middle east. Back in the 1950s, when Israel was in its infancy, there were 2.3 million Jewish people living in Arab states; today, there are fewer than 100,000. They all had to flee Arab states in fear of their lives. We should remember that we are getting greater polarisation of the peoples of the middle east, which is of particular concern.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there are countries in the Muslim world that have been very positive about Jews? I am thinking particularly of relatively enlightened countries such as the Kingdom of Morocco, which has always welcomed Jews and treated them extremely well.

**Bob Blackman**: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. There are clearly exceptions to the rule, but the unfortunate generality is that the Jews have had to flee.

We look forward to a two-state solution, but we should remember that the Palestinian state has never existed as an independent state; it has always been occupied, either by Jordan, the Ottoman empire or someone else. We are therefore creating a state, and when we do so, we must ensure that there is peace, security on all sides, and an opportunity for everyone to live in peace.

We are running out of time with the Obama Administration, from which I suspect we will not see any movement between now and January, when we will have a new President of the United States. Will the Minister ensure that the Government and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are negotiating with the incoming regime in the States on initiating urgent talks between Israel and the Palestinians that can lead to that two-state solution? That would give us the opportunity, during the anniversary of the Balfour declaration, to have real, meaningful talks, without preconditions, with the Israeli Government and the Palestinians sitting down side by side so that everyone can benefit.

10.22 am

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) for presenting the case so well. I am conscious of the time and know that other Members wish to speak, so I shall try to be brief.

I am well known as a friend of Israel; indeed, in my former role as a Member of the Legislative Assembly, I sponsored the Stormont Christian Initiative, which had a strong focus on Israel. The historic ties that began with the Balfour declaration still bring dividends some 99 years later. Other Members have outlined our close economic ties with Israel—our bilateral trade is worth £5 billion and has doubled over the past 10 years—but I want to celebrate our country's historical contribution to the modern state of Israel. I also want to celebrate the contribution that this tiny country on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean sea has made to the world.

The formal recognition of the right to an internationally established homeland for the Jews was one of the more interesting developments to arise at the end of the first world war. The Balfour declaration was clear: it was the first statement of recognition by a major foreign power

[*Jim Shannon*]

of the right of the Jewish people to national self-determination in their homeland, free and safe from persecution. It is good news that Christians can worship freely and without fear of persecution in Israel.

Since its rebirth in 1948, Israel has been attacked many times, and faces many threats daily.

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): It is worth reminding the House that in 1922 the League of Nations overwhelmingly ratified the Balfour agreement—it was unanimous.

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

I can well remember the six-day war from when I was a boy. It will always stick in my mind as the underdog holding fast and winning the battle. I remember listening to the radio and my parents discussing what was happening. It was one of those things: from a very early age, I could understand that this fight would seem always to exist.

A debate such as this could easily degenerate and make the motion appear anti-Palestinian, but that is not what it is about. We are celebrating the declaration that was instrumental in the Jews being allowed to establish an internationally recognised homeland. The debate is about recognising the formalisation of the right for that area of the middle east to be asserted as their homeland—as the Israel we all know from biblical times.

The policy expressed in the declaration—the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine—became binding in international law following the 1920 San Remo conference and the 1922 British mandate from the League of Nations, which was referred to earlier. UN resolution 181 reinforced the state of Israel's acceptance into the family of nations following the 1948 war of independence.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the motion is not anti-Palestinian; it is quite the opposite. Does he agree that the centenary is an opportunity to encourage both sides to get together and look towards a formal peace process?

**Jim Shannon:** That is absolutely what it is about. We are positive about this debate, and that is what we are trying to achieve.

I have spoken many times in the House about the benefits of our being allies with Israel, along with the trade that other Members have referred to. Think of the pharmaceuticals, technology, cyber-security and research. Israel has made new drugs for Parkinson's sufferers; an implantable bio-retina that stimulates neurons to send messages to the brain; and a new plasma that amazingly eradicates the need for stitches, staples or glue. Those are some of the things that Israel does, and does well.

Israel is a nation that can do so much for the rest of the world. It should be allowed to carry out that work free from the prejudice and the cloud of distrust that so often surrounds it. I spoke on anti-Semitism in the House two years ago; it is unfortunate that it is still to be found, including in the so-called boycott of Israeli products. If people only knew what they would be doing without, they would think seriously about that.

Along with so many colleagues, I am anticipating the plans that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will bring forward for the commemoration of this historic event. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): Before my hon. Friend concludes, does he agree that one thing we found in the Northern Ireland peace process, from which many lessons have been drawn, was that growing economic prosperity for everyone makes a major difference? Boycotts and economic sanctions, and all that kind of talk, damage the prospects for peace.

**Jim Shannon:** My right hon. Friend and colleague has very wise words, and they are important to listen to.

I stand today in celebration of the Balfour declaration and its historic impact. Furthermore, I stand today in celebration of Israel, and in continuing solidarity with her in her struggle to be allowed to exist and to provide safety and security to Jews and non-Jews alike.

10.27 am

**Mr Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing this tremendous debate.

In the few minutes I have, I shall explain a little of the reasoning behind the Balfour declaration. It is unusual because it was not a settlement or reaction to any kind of nationalist war or terrorist activity, in the way we are now used to; rather, it had its roots in lobbying carried out in the Parliaments of Europe, mainly by the bourgeoisie and aristocrats. Herzl and Lord Rothschild would have been seen as pretty distant characters to, say, their Polish ghetto co-religionists, who were much more likely to follow the socialist kibbutz-type Zionism that eventually had an important role in the practical settlement of the new state.

What actually happened? What did Herzl do that made such different Jewish characters and political creeds all move generally in the same nationalist direction? Herzl was the first person to explain how Europe's Jews were not only individually or nationally in peril, but internationally at risk. In less than a decade he persuaded most Jews of most classes and political views that, whether or not they as individual Jews wished to live in Europe, the Jews' collective future depended on their once again having their own independent nation on their own soil. He suggested that the concept of Jews as a wandering diaspora should be replaced with Jews being allowed to lead the life of normal people, with all the rights, benefits and, indeed, challenges that go with that.

Herzl died in 1904, some 13 years before the declaration, but the dream he created was that of a functioning Jewish homeland, and it was that dream that brought the Jews out of the ghetto culture and mentality and out of the ghetto language of Yiddish, and that brought many of them physically out of the ghettos and into Israel. The dream empowered Jews as human beings; it permitted them to be proud to stand up for their rights with a united destiny, based on shared religious and cultural values, not least the rebirth of the spoken Hebrew language.

It was that Zionist movement that increasingly persuaded world leaders to understand that Jewish homelessness must come to an end and that the solution was down to the international community and world leaders, working together with the Jewish people.

That was the spirit of recognition encapsulated in the Balfour declaration, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne explained so well, was then incorporated into the Sèvres peace treaty with the Ottoman empire and finally the UN resolution that established the state of Israel. It is for this reason that Jews around the world highly valued the Balfour declaration then and it is why I believe it should still be celebrated now by those who understand or accept the then Zionist dream, now reality of a Jewish homeland in Israel.

10.30 am

**George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) for initiating what I am sure will be a year of these discussions.

I have the honour to represent East Lothian, which, of course, was the seat that Arthur Balfour represented in this House. His name is still very much alive in East Lothian. I visited Whittingehame, where he lived and where—I think—there were Cabinet meetings occasionally in the long recess. Whittingehame also became the home to around half of the Kindertransport children who came to the UK in 1939. They were sent to Whittingehame because the Balfour family had turned it into a farming school and during world war two the children there learned farming skills. Many of them then went to Palestine in the late 1940s and were involved in the kibbutz movement. I therefore have an affinity with this subject.

It is right that we should mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour declaration, but I use the word “mark” very carefully, rather than “celebrate”. It is an important historical moment in time but it is—and this is my basic point—unfinished business. The declaration foresaw not only one homeland for the Jewish people but that the rights of other people and other growing nationalities in the region would be protected. Clearly, that has not happened. So the underlying message, and the thing that we can give to history and the peoples of the middle east in the next 12 months, is to reanimate the peace process, so that we end up with two states.

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I am just back from a week in the middle east as part of the first Scottish National party delegation to Israel and Palestine, and I have returned with a number of thoughts. Above all else, as my hon. Friend said, it is absolutely vital that we do everything we can to support progress towards a sustainable two-state solution for these two peoples. Does he agree?

**George Kerevan:** I do indeed. Given the time, however, I will not take further interventions. Please do not think that I am being disrespectful to other Members.

I will comment very briefly on the two-state solution. The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) made the point in his speech that sometimes the two-state rhetoric hides other agendas. On behalf of the SNP, I will be very plain: we are genuinely supportive of a two-state solution. In fact, finding that solution is the key to Israel's security.

For good or ill, Israel has decided in recent decades that its security is basically based on force of arms. As the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), said, time is running out for that approach.

I had the great opportunity to have conversations with Ariel Sharon while he was still Prime Minister about the whole issue of Israel's security. As an old general, he tended to look at things in military terms and his explanation to me was that the extension of the west bank settlements and the maintenance of an Israeli security zone within the west bank was necessary, as he put it, to protect the tank avenues through which tank thrusts from Syria or Iraq would come into Israel and cut it off very quickly. That is because, as we know, the narrow waist of Israel is tiny and it is possible to get a tank thrust through there very quickly.

Does anyone in this Chamber really think that Syria or Iraq, or any of the other major states in the middle east, are in any sense capable, as we speak, of taking on Israel militarily, or even politically? Of course they are not. Therefore, Israel has a security window where it can produce a two-state solution. That is where we have to go. My question to the Minister is this: how will the British Government use this 12 months to ensure that that happens, because Britain has a responsibility?

The Balfour declaration is not quite as it has been presented today. It is a studiously ambivalent document and quite deliberately so, because Britain and France had decided to exclude the Ottoman empire from the Wilson principles, expressed at Versailles, of self-determination. The middle east was not given self-determination; it was carved up by the British and French for their own political and economic ends.

That remained the case all through the time of the British mandate. It is very strange—I say this because I want to try to find as much common ground here as possible—that in all the speeches we have had this morning, nobody has strayed into the territory of what happened during the time of the British mandate, when both the Jewish people and the Arab people rose in revolt against the way that Britain had handled its mandate. In fact, in 1948—sadly, in my view—Britain walked away from the mandate, leaving a mess. That was because the British mandate was not seen as a way of bringing two peoples to self-determination; it was a way of securing Britain's military presence in the canal zone and in the middle east as oil production developed.

The Balfour declaration is nowhere near as selfless as it has been presented here today. It was part of a chain of diplomatic initiatives that Britain had, which broke up the old Ottoman empire. Anybody who sensibly looks at the state of the middle east now would say that those interventions made things worse rather than better. If we recognise that, we will be in a position morally—I say this to the Minister—to begin to come back and to say how we can provide some redress for the political and economic disaster that we caused in the middle east. We have a debt of honour, because of the Balfour declaration. If the declaration means anything to anybody, it means unfinished business.

That is as far as I think we should go in history. If we start picking over every single piece of “who did what?” over the last hundred years, we will not get anywhere; I say that humbly to Government Members. A lot has been made in a number of speeches about 1948, when it is absolutely clear that the UN declared a mandate for two nations within a particular map. That project foundered in the first Arab-Israeli war. However, if we mention that war and if we say that the Arab states were wrong to intervene in 1948 and should have respected the UN

[George Kerevan]

mandate, we are duty-bound—I put this to the hon. Member for Eastbourne—to accept all the other UN mandates and security resolutions. Those are the 12 UN Security Council resolutions that condemned the illegal settlements on the west bank.

I have also met the current Prime Minister of Israel; I talked to him and I understand his position of wanting talks without preconditions, which is a fair point to make. However, if Israel, while it is waiting for negotiations without preconditions with the Palestinians to begin, is expanding the illegal settlements—I use the word “illegal” because they have been condemned as illegal by the British Government and the UN Security Council—its good faith is called into question, and we need good faith somewhere in this debate.

I will finish by saying, “Let’s mark the Balfour declaration”, but the only way of marking it is to finish the process that it started, which will end in two states and the recognition of a Palestinian state.

10.38 am

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate under your chairmanship, Mr Chope.

I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing the debate as part of the commemorations marking the centenary of the Balfour declaration. As we have heard, the 1917 declaration signalled the beginning of Britain’s official support for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people.

Even before the famous letter from Lord Balfour to Walter Rothschild, the Labour party supported that commitment. The war aims memorandum, which was adopted by the inter-allied Labour and socialist conference in 1918 and quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) today, stated:

“Palestine should be set free...in order that this country may form a free State, under international guarantee, to which such of the Jewish people as desire to do so may return”.

Labour’s first Cabinet Minister, Arthur Henderson, outlined his support at the time of the war aims memorandum, stating:

“The British Labour Party believes that the responsibility of the British people in Palestine should be fulfilled to the utmost of their power. It believes that these responsibilities may be fulfilled so as to ensure the economic prosperity”—

that picks up some of the points made earlier—

“and spiritual freedom of both the Jews and Arabs in Palestine.”

That support for the state of Israel has been at the core of the Labour party’s foreign policy since those early days. As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) alluded to, between 1917 and 1945 support for Zionism was expressed at Labour party conferences on no fewer than 11 occasions. We stand in solidarity as we mark the 100 years, and we stand firmly against anyone who questions Israel’s right to exist.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Both Israel and Palestine have a right to exist. Does the Minister agree that the UK Government should now join the 70% of the other member states and recognise a Palestine state?

**Catherine West:** I believe that the Minister will answer that point shortly. The Labour party supports a comprehensive peace in the middle east: a permanent and long-term peace based on a two-state solution. That is a secure Israel alongside a secure and viable state of Palestine, respecting the boundaries as outlined in UN resolution 242 from 1967. Violence against Israel in any form is unacceptable and can never be justified. It represents a mortal threat to any peaceful, long-term solution. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bury South said, any hatred of Jewish people is anathema, wherever it is found.

At a time when peace is also under threat from the retroactive legalisation of settler outposts in the west bank and the prospect of new settlements in the west bank, we must continue to reiterate the importance of the Israeli Government remaining committed to the two-state solution.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Does the shadow Minister not think we should do more than just issue platitudes about the illegal settlements and the fact that outposts are now being legalised by the Israeli Government? Firm action needs to be taken.

**Catherine West:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, but I beg to differ: these are not platitudes; I am stating a position. Anyone who has visited the area knows this is a very sensitive topic that needs to be dealt with carefully without inflammatory language.

**Mr David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Is it not important to offer practical support to projects for peaceful coexistence, such as Save a Child’s Heart, the Peres Centre for Peace and Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow? Those organisations are showing the lead in terms of the spirit of Balfour and the peaceful coexistence we all want between Palestinians and Israelis.

**Catherine West:** The hon. Gentleman is right to mention the economic element. If we could somehow provide better livelihoods for people across the area, we would make some gains, but there are real barriers to proper economic development within various communities in the area. Any charitable work that is done to promote that development should be welcomed.

Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are unlawful under international law. The continued demolition of Palestinian structures undermines the Palestinian communities’ ability to develop socially and economically. That in turn undermines the viability of a future Palestinian state. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter)—he is no longer in his place—pointed out, the Balfour declaration also made the commitment that

“nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

We have heard about the Christian community today. We have supported and honoured Lord Balfour’s commitment to create a national home for the Jewish people. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar) said, it is now incumbent on us all to honour the second part of the declaration. My right hon. Friend is no longer in his place, but he said we need international guarantees. I look forward to hearing how

the Minister interprets the concept of the international guarantees. We need to ensure the rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine.

As we approach the centenary of the Balfour declaration, the Labour party is glad to commemorate that historic anniversary. We express our continued support for the state of Israel. We remain committed to seeing the achievement of lasting security, stability and peace in the region. However, we find ourselves in something of a deadlock with the peace process. The Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for East Lothian (George Kerevan), referred to that earlier. Will the Minister enlighten Members as to what the Government are doing to rejuvenate the moribund approach to peace in this critical area of the middle east?

There are enough progressive forces on all sides of the Israel-Palestine conflict to shift the debate away from extreme and entrenched positions and towards that lasting peace. As we always have done, we will continue to do our part to support that process, to help ensure that the two-state solution becomes a genuine reality and to deliver the full intent of the Balfour declaration.

10.45 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I begin, as others have, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) on securing this important debate. It is an honour to be able to respond to a debate on the centenary of the Balfour declaration, which is the letter written on 2 November 1917 by the then Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, the leader of the British Jewish community.

If I may, I will place in context today's instability and conflict, which goes back beyond 100 years. Arguably it goes back thousands of years, because this complex part of the world—it is often referred to as the cradle of civilisation—forms the crossroads of three continents. Along the riverbanks, oases and coastlines, we saw the start of humanity, where we harnessed the skills of farming, writing and trading and built the first cities. This complicated real estate gave the world the three great monotheistic religions whose values underpin much of the morality of the world today.

Successive civilisations—the superpowers of their day, whether the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Romans, the Byzantines or the Ottomans—sought ownership of these tribal areas, the rich trade routes and the holy sites. With the collapse of the Ottoman empire at the end of the great war, it was Britain's turn as the occupying power to manage this complex, multilingual, multi-faith tribal land. Britain was motivated by a range of ambitions at the time—some altruistic and some self-interested. The decisions and influences made then continue to provoke intense discussion today, whether that is the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Balfour declaration, the McMahon-Hussein correspondence, or Britain's general role in shaping the middle east.

The Balfour declaration is part of our history that some celebrate and some condemn. It did not create the state of Israel, but it was a stepping stone along the way. When Theodor Herzl was writing his vision of Zionism

in the late 19th century, the preference was for a Jewish homeland in the biblical land of Israel, and that movement grew. That land, which included Jerusalem and the meeting point of the three Abrahamic religions, became a destination for Jewish migration, first under the Ottoman empire, then under the British mandate, and finally after the establishment of the Israeli state.

The Balfour declaration played a part in that story, but like so much foreign policy, it was a product of its age. It was written in a world of competing imperial powers, in the midst of the first world war and in the twilight of the Ottoman empire. Many people believe that establishing a homeland for the Jewish people in the land to which they had such strong historical and religious ties was the right and moral thing to do. It is for historians to assess the declaration in that context, and it is for Ministers to deal with today. Balfour's 67 words are dissected and analysed, and that has happened today, but it was a statement of intent, rather than a detailed plan. The details came later, in the San Remo agreement of 1920 and in the League of Nations mandate for Palestine in 1922. The Israeli state was established after the end of Britain's mandate.

The Balfour declaration had its flaws. It called for the protection of the

“civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

It should have protected their political rights, too, most especially their right to self-determination: a right that underpins the British commitment to a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will mark the centenary of the Balfour declaration next year. Planning is still at an early stage, but I want to make it clear that we will neither celebrate nor apologise.

We will not apologise, for the UK is a diverse country in which the historical show of support for the world's Jewish community means a great deal to many people. We continue to support the principle of a Jewish homeland and the modern state of Israel, just as we support the critical objective of a Palestinian homeland. Nor will we celebrate the centenary as others have called on the British Government to do. The seriousness of the situation faced by millions still affected by the conflict is testament to the fact that the achievement of Jewish and Palestinian self-determination in the former British mandate of Palestine is a task as yet unfulfilled. I remain conscious of the sensitivities surrounding the declaration and the events that have taken place in the region since 1917.

We cannot change the past, but we can strive to influence the future. It is approaching 100 years since the Balfour declaration, and, as has been mentioned by hon. Members, it is 50 years since the occupation began. It is 70 years since UN resolution 181 in 1947 first proposed partition and the end of the British mandate. It is 23 years since the Oslo accords and 16 years since the Camp David discussions. It is 25 years since the Madrid talks and 18 years since the Wye River discussions. All those were opportunities when stakeholders were brought round the table to seek a long-term solution, and still that eludes us.

**Catherine West:** Will the Minister comment on the recent French Government initiative?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will come to that shortly.

[Mr Ellwood]

Agreements and gatherings have come and gone and we have not been able to make progress, but let us turn to the south and see the deal that took place 36 years ago between Israel and Egypt and, further to the west, with Jordan in 1994, 22 years ago. That proves what can happen when sides come together, conflict stops, war is put aside and strong leadership comes together. The relationship between Israel, Egypt and Jordan is to be commended. It shows that deals can be struck regardless of what has happened in the past.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): Does the Minister agree that leadership from Britain must include British values? There are more than 3,000 British graves in Gaza's cemeteries. Does he agree that British values include protecting refugees and children, hence the right to return for refugees and protection of children in courts?

**Mr Ellwood:** I do. I will come on to what Britain is doing in the occupied territories in the west bank and Gaza as well as in Israel if time permits.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a highly emotive issue, as has been expressed today. Israel has achieved statehood while the Palestinians have not. The UK Government are very clear that the occupation of the Palestinian territories is unacceptable and unsustainable. In the long term, it is not in Israel's best interest for the status quo to continue. If this is to be a homeland for the Jewish people, the demographics show that there will be an imbalance in the next few years. More than 40,000 Palestinians are helping to provide security in Areas A and B. Were that to be removed—were the Palestinians to give up—it would be up to the Israelis to provide that security. Is that a direction we would want to go in? Is that the path that we would want to go down or even test? It is in everybody's interests not to believe in the status quo but to work towards a two-state solution.

Not everyone will be happy with the Government's position on the anniversary of the Balfour declaration. I fully accept that. Some will want to celebrate the anniversary unreservedly and will see our position as insufficient. Some will condemn it. They will want us to make the apology and will consider marking the anniversary improper. There is no denying the document's significance. I hope that it will not be used as a vehicle to incite violence or distract us from taking the steps we need to take to secure the two-state solution.

**Tom Brake:** Will the Minister use his next four minutes or so to set out a concrete UK Government initiative that he will be driving to ensure we achieve the two-state solution?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will lead up to that towards the end. I intend to make such points.

An awful lot of effort, noise and concern have been expressed about the Balfour declaration and its 100th anniversary. I would hate it to be seen as an

excuse to incite further violence. We need to learn from the past, but work towards the future. A future with prosperity and security is what the Israelis and Palestinians want. On a personal note, it has been three years leading to the right hon. Gentleman's point and it has been a privilege to be the Minister for the middle east. In those three years, the British Government, the Foreign Secretaries and I have been fully committed to doing what we can in leveraging our support and our influence to bring the parties to the table.

I have sat through a series of meetings in New York at the UN General Assembly and in Paris at the summit that took place there, and I asked who the leaders will be, given that so many years have passed since Oslo, Madrid, Wye River and Camp David. When will we finally find the solution, get an accord in place and recognise the two states? Of all my briefs and challenges, this has been the toughest and most frustrating in not being able to make progress. In answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question, at the moment we seem further away than ever from bringing the parties together. We are not seeing the leadership on the Palestinian side that would invoke the necessary measures of support to bring people to the table. On the Israeli side, it makes it much tougher to defend our friend and ally when we see the continuing building in the settlements.

I certainly hope that in the absence of moving closer to a solution, there will be a new opportunity with the new Administration in the United States. I ask the new Administration, as they settle in, to consider what needs to be done. Other issues across the world have come and gone. We have had conflict in the Balkans, the Berlin wall has come down, yet we now have new issues coming to the fore: Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. Other problems can be solved, yet still the middle east peace process eludes us. I ask the United States to work with the international community, along with the Israelis and Palestinians. Let us recognise the 100-year anniversary, but let us not mark 2017 by what has happened in the past and the fact that it has been 100 years, but by what we can achieve for the future.

10.58 am

**Caroline Ansell:** As I had envisaged, the debate has been lively with passion on all sides. It really struck me when an hon. Member talked about grieving and lamenting. Today we can all grieve and lament the lives that have been lost and the conflict that we have seen, but I hope too that we can all see what has come forward and positively affected the world in the creation of the state of Israel and the justice that has been served there. I hope we can all with one voice urge again the resumption of direct peace talks that stand steadfastly in the interests of the people of Israel and Palestine.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the centenary of the Balfour Declaration.

## East Anglian Fishing Fleet

11 am

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the East Anglian fishing fleet.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Chope. I am pleased to have secured this debate. With Brexit pending, it provides a well-timed opportunity to highlight the challenges faced by the East Anglian fishing fleet, and the policies that are needed to reinvigorate an industry that has been an integral feature of the East Anglian coast for nearly 1,000 years.

In recent years, the industry has been reduced to a very pale shadow of its former self. Although I am not looking to turn back the clock and wallow in nostalgia, Brexit does provide an opportunity to put in place a new policy framework that can give fishing in East Anglia a fresh lease of life and bring significant benefits to the ports and communities in which the industry is based. It is an opportunity to start with a clean sheet of paper.

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is not just about the East Anglia fishing community? It is also about other fishing communities, such as mine in Plymouth, down in the south-west, where they are very much hoping for better facilities in order to produce better fishing.

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair)**: Order. This is a debate about the future of the East Anglian fishing fleet. Unless my geography is wrong, I do not think that includes Plymouth.

**Peter Aldous**: I think I would say two things. A lot of what I am going to say about the East Anglian fishing industry does relate to the south-west fishing industry, but I would also make the point that we need localised management going forward to address the specific issues of local fisheries. That was one of the problems with the common fisheries policy. We want to develop our own East Anglian policy. In the same way, my hon. Friend should develop a policy for his industry in the south-west, and likewise in Northern Ireland—[*Interruption.*] I see that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) wants to intervene.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to local community involvement. We need to have that across all the fishing communities, wherever they may be in the United Kingdom. In my constituency of Strangford, the fishing industry is also very important. The Irish Republic has introduced a six-mile limit, which is totally out of order—

**Mr Christopher Chope (in the Chair)**: Order. That is too long an intervention.

**Peter Aldous**: A lot of what I am going to say is important for the whole of the coast of the British Isles. Our withdrawal from the common fisheries policy provides an opportunity to put in place a policy framework in which the East Anglian fleet and all those who work in the industry are given a realistic opportunity of earning

a good wage and securing a fair return on the investment in their boats and equipment. That is the very least they deserve in what is the most dangerous trade in Britain.

It is appropriate to quietly reflect on the challenges faced by all those who go to sea, their families and those who support them, including the Fishermen's Mission, so ably run from Lowestoft along most of the eastern and southern coast by Tim Jenkins, as well as the Royal National Lifeboat Institution crews in Lowestoft, Hunstanton, Wells, Sheringham, Cromer, Happisburgh, Gorleston, Southwold and Aldeburgh. Last month I had the pleasure of meeting Jeff Melton, the skipper of the *Serene Dawn* from Lowestoft, who lost his leg while at sea. His courage, determination and humour shone through. We owe it to people like him to grasp the opportunity that now presents itself.

The East Anglian coast, along with its ports, harbours and fishing villages, has been shaped by fishing over the last millennium. A significant industry and way of life grew up all along the coast, focused on such places as King's Lynn, Wells, Sheringham, Cromer, Winterton, Great Yarmouth, Gorleston, Lowestoft, Pakefield, Kessingland, Southwold, Walberswick, Dunwich, Aldeburgh, Orford, Felixstowe and Ipswich. Part of the industry was and still is focused on shellfish such as crabs, shrimps and mussels, while large commercial fleets and allied industries grew up in the larger ports of Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth, where the industry was underpinned by herrings, the silver darlings of the North sea.

**Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned King's Lynn, in my constituency. The Wash shellfishery is one of the best and biggest in Europe and the shrimp fishery has had record catches this year, which is very good for exports. Is my hon. Friend aware that the Marine Stewardship Council is now recommending that 14% of the shrimp fishery be closed down, which could have very adverse consequences?

**Peter Aldous**: I was not aware of that precise detail. The shrimp industry is an integral part of the industry in East Anglia. We do have to keep in mind the risks as well as the opportunities presented by Brexit.

Seemingly overnight in the last part of the 20th century, those silver darlings—the herrings—disappeared, and an entire industry has been annihilated as a result of overfishing, red tape and poorly thought-through policies coming out of both Whitehall and Brussels, the high cost of fuel and changes in eating habits. With it, the whole edifice has come crumbling down. Ancillary industries such as boatbuilding, repairs and food processing have largely disappeared, although Birds Eye and processors such as Sam Cole remain significant employers in my constituency.

Lowestoft was the fishing capital of the southern North sea. In years gone by, one could cross the water from one side of the Hamilton Dock to the other by walking from boat to boat. Today, the dock is virtually empty of fishing boats. In the past four decades, Lowestoft has been particularly hard hit by wrong decisions by politicians and the vulnerability of the make-up of the industry, whereby large trawlers helped to sustain the smaller boats. The way that the quota has been allocated has been a major factor in Lowestoft's dramatic decline, as it has taken away the trawlers that were the cornerstone of the industry. The six affiliated vessels in the Lowestoft

[Peter Aldous]

producers' organisation have a fixed quota allocation of 80,419 units this year. That is a significant amount of fish, but none of it is landed in Lowestoft—68% goes to the Netherlands and 32% to Scotland. Those boats—the *Wilhelmina*, the *Ansgar*, the *Margriet*, the *Hendriks Brands*, the *Sola Fide* and the *Sol Deo Gloria*—bring very little if any economic and social benefits to Lowestoft.

Today, the Lowestoft fleet and much of the East Anglian fleet is made up of small boats, known as the under-10s, which get a raw deal in terms of quota. Nationally, the under-10s comprise 77% of the UK fleet and employ 65% of the workforce, yet they receive only 4% of the total quota. That is not enough for skippers to sustain a business, let alone earn a sensible living, and that story is not unique to Lowestoft. It is a tale all along the East Anglian coast and beyond. The under-10s face significant challenges, including being forced out by a lack of quota, poor markets and unfair competition in fishing grounds from other sectors.

Brexit provides an opportunity to address those inequities. There is a need to reallocate fishing quota based on performance and impact so as to support small fishing communities such as those along the East Anglian coast. There is the added benefit that, by restoring fishing stocks to healthy levels, it will be possible to create more resilient marine ecosystems and preserve future fishing opportunities.

This may appear to be a statement of the bleeding obvious, but it is important to set the forthcoming negotiations for withdrawal from the common fisheries policy in a political context. Most of the East Anglian coast voted heavily for Brexit. Although I personally did not, believing that the reformed common fisheries policy, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) played such an important role in creating, provided an opportunity to regenerate the industry in East Anglia, I accept the outcome of the referendum. We now need to pull together to put in place a UK fishing policy that enables fishing to flourish along the East Anglian coast and around the whole of the UK. It is vital that we leave no stone unturned in doing that; otherwise, communities will have an even greater sense of alienation, isolation and abandonment.

Post Brexit, it is important to give local inshore fishermen a fair deal and not forget them. Their industry is vital to the future of the coastal communities in which they live and work. Moreover, they have a key role to play in marine stewardship. To enable the East Anglian fleet to realise its full potential, we need to address the unfairness of the current system, in which three companies hold 61% of all quotas and fishing rights in England.

It is important to remember that fishing policy is not just about fishing. It has a key role to play in the regeneration of coastal Britain—parts of the country that have had a raw deal in recent years. If we put in place the right policy framework, fishing can play an important role in revitalising the economy in those areas. That involves breaking out of ministerial silos and working closely with other Departments. Although I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister is already doing so, I urge him to work closely with the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, our hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who has responsibility for coastal communities.

Brexit is a unique opportunity to reverse the years of social and economic decline in coastal areas, to rebalance the economy and to close the gaps between marginal and well-off regions and communities. As the New Economics Foundation pointed out in its report, “Blue New Deal: Revitalising the UK Coast”, fishing is one of five sectors that can help to revitalise coastal Britain. The others are aquaculture, tourism, energy and coastal management. Well-managed fisheries that allow fish stocks to grow to their maximum potential can lead to healthier marine ecosystems that produce and sustain more fish, provide more jobs and contribute more to the local economy.

A change in fishing quota allocation that encourages less environmentally damaging practices and acknowledges the contribution of the coastal small-scale fleet to the unique identities of the fishing communities in which they are based is vital to achieving that. Research by the New Economics Foundation shows that restoring UK fish stocks to a healthy level and promoting low-carbon emissions through quota reallocation across the fleet would lead across the country to an extra 457,000 tonnes of fish being landed annually, an additional £268 million pounds of gross value added and a 24% increase in employment, equivalent to 4,922 new jobs. Doing that will strengthen coastal economies and enable fishing to become more financially and environmentally sustainable.

I will quickly comment on the Brexit negotiations, in which I anticipate the Minister will play a pivotal role on fishing. I urge him to ensure that there is a fishing pillar to the Brexit negotiations. The industry must not be a sacrificial lamb, as many feel it has been in the past. He has rightly focused much of his attention to date on reclaiming control of our territorial waters and ensuring that the UK is able to take responsibility for our waters out to 200 miles or the relevant median lines. He has a far better grasp of the relative strength of his negotiating hand than I have, although from my perspective, having briefly studied the provisions of the 1964 London convention, the United Nations convention on the law of the sea and the Fishery Limits Acts 1976, it appears that he should be able to put together a coherent legal argument. I wish him well in what I am sure will be tough bartering that will make the annual December Fisheries Council meeting look like child's play.

The Minister has highlighted the significant potential fishing opportunities that will arise from Brexit once we have taken control of our territorial waters. More fish will be available for UK fishermen to catch. However, I urge him not to rest on his laurels once he has achieved that; it is not the endgame. To ensure a bright future for the East Anglian fishing fleet, he needs to address other issues in his negotiations. First, he must ensure that the nought-to-12-mile zone is exclusively available to the inshore fleet—the smaller, UK passive-gear vessels that are at present pinned into the six-mile limit, as any pots or nets set outside that area are often towed away by foreign vessels, such as Dutch electro-pulse beam trawlers, which are currently decimating our stocks.

**Jim Shannon:** On that issue, the six-mile limit that has just been imposed by the Republic of Ireland on fishermen from Northern Ireland is something that concerns us in the United Kingdom. Is the hon. Gentleman also concerned about that?

**Peter Aldous:** I think that is something we need to look at. I am very much East Anglian-focused today, but I respect the hon. Gentleman's position.

Creating such a zone for the inshore fleet will have significant benefits for fish stocks and the wider marine environment. Secondly, it is necessary to address the elephant in the room—the flagship issue. Lord Justice Cranston's 2012 High Court judgment appears to provide the basis for a step-wise repatriation of UK quotas, which should bring significant benefits to Lowestoft, where the Lowestoft Fish Producers Organisation currently lands no fish.

Thirdly, it is important to bear in mind the fact that the East Anglian fishermen who specialise in shellfish, such as those in the Wash, export to EU countries, and the processing industries do likewise. Their interests need to be safeguarded in the Brexit negotiations. Many small-scale fishing businesses currently rely on shellfish due to a lack of access to finfish quotas. The Government should therefore give them more such opportunities. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs should work closely with the Department for International Trade to open up new global markets for shellfish and the processing businesses, such as in the far east.

I am aware that the negotiations will not be straightforward. There will be a lot of devil in the detail, and a lot of issues will need to be disentangled, as reciprocal fishing rights in many fisheries go back over centuries. That means that it will take some time to complete the exit negotiations, and it will be necessary to put in place transitional arrangements. In his reply, will the Minister confirm that that and the other issues I have mentioned are firmly on his and his colleagues' radar?

Although there is much to be done in the short term on the Brexit negotiations, I would like to look ahead and think strategically about the shape and future of the new, UK fishing policy and what it needs to incorporate so that the East Anglian fleet can flourish and play an important economic, environmental and social role in the communities and areas in which it is based. I suggest that the new UKFP that replaces the CFP should include the following ingredients. First, it should be set in a wide context and take account of the fact that it is not just about fishing. We need think holistically. A good, sustainable fishing policy has a positive impact on the whole community and the area in which the industry is based. Fishing is part of a wider, healthier environment. It is about attractive seascapes, good wholesome local food, local tourism, and local heritage, culture and identity.

Secondly, we need to start with a clean sheet of paper. We must not simply transfer the common fisheries policy to UK law through the great repeal Bill and then amend it. As the Institute of Economic Affairs noted, the CFP is not an effective way of managing fishing rights, so we need our own bespoke UK fishing policy, although I would like it to include policies that mirror articles 2 and 17 of the CFP, which promote a sustainable approach to fisheries management.

Thirdly, the new policy should be underpinned by science. That means that the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, which is based in Lowestoft, should have a pivotal role in monitoring and enforcing management. Fourthly, the management of

fisheries needs to be localised. That could mean that there should be an enhanced role for the Eastern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. Fifthly, as I have said, the quota needs to be reallocated and it should be available only to active fishermen. It should not be held as an investment by large organisations with no involvement in fishing.

Finally, special emphasis and real effort must be focused on building up strong and resilient supply chains all the way from the net to the plate. They should include fishermen, boat builders and repairers, markets, merchants, smokehouses, processors, mongers, fish and chip shops, restaurants and food stores. This is something we need to do better in the UK. There are lessons to be learned from other industries and other countries. We need better supply chain integration and marketing at home and overseas to promote high-quality domestically caught fish and fish products. A new coastal producer organisation, as proposed by Jerry Percy of the New Under Ten Fishermen's Association, can help to achieve that, building on the good work of Seafish. There may be a role for local enterprise partnerships, such as the New Anglia local enterprise partnership, and it is important that Government make necessary funds available to them and to others to do the work.

I sense that I have spoken for far too long, and we need to hear from the Minister. In conclusion, therefore, as we approach Brexit it is important to have in mind the three R's: repatriation, reallocation and regeneration.

11.20 am

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) on securing the debate. He is a long-standing champion of the fishing industry generally and the under-10 metre sector in Lowestoft in his constituency specifically. Lowestoft is also home to CEFAS, the world's greatest centre of excellence for fisheries science, and long may it continue to be so.

My hon. Friend described some of the history of the decline of fishing in areas such as Lowestoft and along the east coast. The reasons are varied. He highlighted the decline of the herring industry, for example, and the fact that herring became a less popular fish in this country. Further north, the decline of fishing in places such as Grimsby can be plotted against the cod wars and the UK long-distance fleet being displaced from the waters around Iceland. Now that we are leaving the European Union, however, we have many opportunities to reform and change the way we manage fisheries in our exclusive economic zone.

My hon. Friend made it clear that he had campaigned to remain. I should probably point out that I campaigned to leave, and one of my reasons for doing so was my experience as a Fisheries and an Agriculture Minister over three years, which meant that I saw up close how EU law works in practice, as well as in theory. That made me conclude that we would do better if we took back control and made our own laws—we could get things done and change things when they needed changing.

In the specific context of fisheries, I highlighted two issues in the referendum campaign. First, at the moment we allow the EU to lead for us in important negotiations on pelagic species such as mackerel, and on the North

[George Eustice]

sea with countries such as Norway. Those negotiations would be more effective if we had a seat at the table. Secondly, leaving the EU gives us an opportunity to revisit the allocation of quotas, which in some cases is unfair—parts of the fleet do not get a fair share of the agreed international quota.

Now the referendum is over, however, it is important that we all stop fighting the referendum campaign. For me, the real challenge is to put together a new type of partnership to recognise what the people of this country were telling us: they want us to take back control, although they also want us to put in place a close working partnership with other countries. They want us to be an outward-looking country, which we certainly will be as the UK.

In the referendum campaign, I was also clear that some things would not change. First, we will still fish sustainably and in line with the science. The UK has been the champion of sustainable fisheries. Secondly, we need to have some kind of quota or effort regime to restrict fishing effort, because in a mixed fishery that is the only way to have sustainable fisheries. Thirdly, I was very clear that we must continue to strive to end the shameful practice of discarding perfectly good fish back into the sea. That remains a manifesto commitment and an objective of future policy. Finally, the reality of fisheries is such that there will always need to be a large degree of international negotiation. That will not change.

We are working on new policy, and a huge amount of analysis is going on. My hon. Friend will be reassured to know that many of the issues that he highlighted towards the end of his speech are indeed ones that we are looking at—I will touch on some in more detail. Broadly speaking, however, we have a good starting point in the United Nations convention on the law of the sea, which sets down certain principles on how we should manage fisheries in our exclusive economic zone—inside 200 nautical miles or the median line—and requirements such as the duty to co-operate with other countries, which we of course would do. They, in turn, have a duty to co-operate with us. The convention sets it down that we should have regard for historic access rights, but other countries should have regard for ours. Crucially, however, in our exclusive economic zone we will have the opportunity to change technical measures when they need to be changed, far more quickly.

My hon. Friend raised a number of issues specific to Lowestoft that I will touch on. First, he highlighted the fact that many of the vessels in the Lowestoft Fish Producers Organisation are foreign-owned—many are Dutch—and that a large amount of the catch is landed in the Netherlands and in Scotland. We are looking at that issue. We are about to review what is called the economic link, which is a set of conditions and criteria with which foreign-owned vessels must comply. We are looking at strengthening the link so that more benefits can be returned to local fishing ports such as Lowestoft, for whose vessels the quota was intended. We are planning to consult on the link and we will be looking at it as part of our longer-term review of things such as the concordat with other parts of the UK and as we develop future fisheries policy.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** Will the Minister comment briefly on the point I made about the shrimp fishery and the Wash, and the damage that could be done by the MSC?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend has raised the issue with me. It is a matter for IFCA, but I have asked officials to keep me informed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney drew attention to the under-10s. As he knows, we have a manifesto commitment to rebalance quotas towards the under-10 metre fleet, because the historic problem from when the quotas were set is that the under-10s probably did not get a fair enough share of the quota. We are already delivering on that manifesto commitment. Only this year, we made it clear that in the discard uplift of the quota, the first 100 tonnes and then 10% thereafter would go to the under-10s. That means that this year alone they have already had 1,000 extra tonnes of fish, 573 tonnes of which are in the North sea, including more than 200 extra tonnes of haddock, 100 tonnes of saithe and 159 tonnes of plaice. We have already started to deliver on that and, as we roll out the discard ban, there will be further increases for the under-10 fleet—notably, cod is likely to be added for the North sea.

My hon. Friend mentioned access to the six-to-12 nautical miles zone, which dates from the London convention of 1964 and so predates us entering the CFP. We have had strong representations from the industry, however, that it would like to see that reviewed and to have exclusive access for our inshore UK vessels in the nought-to-12 zone. We are looking at that, but we have not yet taken any final decisions.

My hon. Friend mentioned the challenge of pulse trawlers. Indeed, I visited Lowestoft in his constituency back in June and I met local fishermen, who expressed that concern to me. I then asked CEFAS to do some work urgently to review the impact of pulse trawling, because there are potential issues of concern—countries such as Japan have already taken action to curtail or prevent pulse trawling. I therefore assure him that CEFAS are looking at the issue.

My hon. Friend mentioned flagship issues. A lot of that goes back to the important Factortame test case, which was a big tussle between the sovereignty of Parliament and EU law. There is an opportunity to re-examine that as we leave the EU, but again we have made no prior decisions. The area is complex and we should recognise that the licences, vessels and attached quotas were sold by UK fishermen—we have to recognise that—but I also believe that through the changes to the economic link, which we are planning to consult on, we can go some way towards addressing that concern.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of trade. It is important to note that for countries such as Norway, which are in the European economic area, the customs union does not cover fisheries. Norway and Iceland, for example, therefore have separate preferential trade agreements with the EU. We will obviously be seeking to do something similar as we negotiate future trade agreements with our European partners. We are also keen to open new markets in countries such as China, Japan and others in the far east.

I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of science. We will continue to engage CEFAS closely on that. We are committed to sustainable fisheries. When it

comes to adding value to fisheries in the supply chain—something else he mentioned—we have set up a seafood working group led by Seafish, pulling together industry to see how we can improve the structure of the industry and the value it gets for its catch.

Finally, I confirm to my hon. Friend that as we approach Brexit the Department is working closely with every other Department, including the Department for Communities and Local Government, and he is absolutely right that we have a great opportunity as we negotiate future policy to get something that works for our coastal communities.

*Question put and agreed to.*

11.30 am

*Sitting adjourned.*

## Immigration Rules (International Students)

[MR JAMES GRAY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered immigration rules for international students.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. Tomorrow is International Students' Day, so I thank hon. Members for turning out to mark the occasion. I also thank the numerous organisations that have got in touch to provide helpful thoughts and briefings—enough to fill the debate, although I promise I will not do that.

The debate offers us the chance to celebrate the contribution of international students to our education sector, our economy and our whole society. But not just that—it is also the perfect time to reflect on where the UK is in the increasing global competition to attract international students, what our ambitions should be and whether the Government are pursuing the right immigration policies to achieve those. I suspect that hon. Members will need little persuading that we should celebrate international students, so I will only briefly put on record the economic, social and cultural benefits that they bring.

In economic terms, international students' contribution to UK GDP almost certainly exceeds £10 billion per year and supports around 170,000 full-time equivalent jobs. Many international students go on to undertake post-doctoral research in the UK, helping to drive world-leading research. All analysis of the economic effect of taking on international students shows that they have a significant net benefit.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Leicester has two great universities—Leicester University and De Montfort University—that have a number of international students. Does he agree that not only is it important that we have fair and effective rules so people can answer criticisms that are made of them, but the Government's rhetoric is extremely important? We should encourage more international students to come and study here in the United Kingdom. If they do not, they will just go elsewhere. There is a big market out there, and unless we have them here, we will lose the revenue and advantages that they bring.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I agree wholeheartedly. Indeed, I will mention later the messages that the Government have been sending out and the negative headlines that they have been attracting in key markets for international students. The Government must seriously rethink those messages.

When considering the economic benefits of international students, we must also think about the personal and professional links that 84% of those students maintain after they leave the United Kingdom. They are a tremendous source of soft power for this country and allow trade links and political alliances to be built. We should also remember that those benefits are triggered not only by our universities; hundreds of thousands of other students are taught English as a second language in the UK each year at around 450 institutions accredited by the British Council.

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

The benefits of attracting the brightest international students go way beyond the economy. Such students enrich and diversify the research and learning environment by exposing our own students and staff to different approaches, contributing to their international experience and skills, and creating a more culturally diverse environment.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. Is he aware that Bangor University in my constituency has widespread international links, including a site in China, as well as students from all over the world, all of whom have been made to feel very uncomfortable by the current atmosphere? This is not just a matter of the £400 million that international students contribute to the Welsh economy; it counts at the individual level as well.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Absolutely. There is a feeling of uneasiness among the migrant community more generally in the light of recent events. Again, I urge the Government to rethink their rhetoric about not just students, but migration generally.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Like some of my colleagues, I have two universities in my constituency: the University of Warwick and Coventry University. Students from abroad certainly make a major contribution—about £9 billion per year—to the British economy. That is a hefty sum. To put that another way, 380,000-odd students come to this country per annum. The Government are not really friendly towards students. As some colleagues will recall, the Government abolished the education maintenance allowance, and they do not show much enthusiasm even for apprenticeships and further education.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. International students' contribution to GDP is actually now £10 billion—even higher than the figure he quotes.

I will finish my praise for international students by turning to the St Andrews University students' association, which put out a statement this morning that I think sums things up nicely:

“Universities... owe much of their value and their success to their diversity. Without a student or staffing body comprised of people of all races, religions, class or political allegiance, we cannot and will not achieve the level of quality—in research and personal character—to which the UK is accustomed. By mixing, debating, and learning from those with varied views and cultural backgrounds, we become better, more rounded, more tolerant and accepting individuals.”

Those views are broadly shared by around three quarters of our own students, according to a Higher Education Policy Institute survey.

Turning to where we are now, the UK has for some time been a world leader in attracting international students, but that reputation is in jeopardy.

**Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate, and I echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said about the Government's rhetoric on international students. There are a lot of

students in Hampstead and Kilburn, and they are diverse; they make my constituency what it is. The hon. Gentleman talked about international students' net contribution, which I believe is £14 billion a year. Does he agree that in post-Brexit Britain, we should recognise the value of those students and remove them from the net migration target to make them feel more welcome in our country?

**Stuart C. McDonald:** I agree wholeheartedly. I will turn later to the contradiction that on the one hand, the Treasury appears to be all for increasing our educational exports, but on the other, the Home Office includes students in its net migration target and therefore sees them as a ready target for trying to clamp down on migrant numbers.

In 2014-15, of the around 2.27 million students at UK higher education institutions, more than 125,000 were from other EU countries and more than 300,000 were from non-EU countries. In the most recent year that we have figures for, overall international student numbers just about held up, but the number of new entrants fell by 2.8%. Figures from June this year show that the number of study-related visas granted by the UK fell by 5% from the previous year. The British Council has stated that the UK is beginning to lose market share to competitors.

There are serious concerns about the UK's performance in attracting students from key markets. The number of Indian students enrolling in their first year at UK universities fell by 10% in 2015 compared with the year before. The number of Indian students studying here has fallen by around 50% in the four years since the UK Government started to turn the screw while our rivals were all improving their offer. It is no coincidence that there is now a record number of Indian students in the US, which has, for example, opened up post-study work schemes.

Where do we want to go from here? If any other industry brought such a wealth of benefits to the country, the Government would be mad not to pull out all the stops to go for growth. Education is one of the UK's most successful exports. In what other export market would we say that we were not going to bother so much with expansion and we were quite happy to see our rivals catch us up and overtake us?

The Government's official ambition is for education exports as a whole to be worth £30 billion by 2020. In last year's autumn statement, the Chancellor projected that the number of non-EU students in England alone would rise by just over 7% in the next two years and by 3.2% in the two years after that, but if the 0.6% increase in student enrolments last year is anything to go by, the Government's goal, modest though it is, has no chance of being met.

The Government must be much more ambitious. While our share of international students is beginning to falter, international student numbers are growing much more significantly and strongly in countries such as the US, Australia and Canada—in fact, those countries are in a completely different league from us. International student numbers are expected to grow significantly around the world in the years ahead, so the opportunities are there if we want to take them, but countries such as Canada, Australia, Germany, New Zealand, China, Japan and Taiwan often talk about doubling their number of international students by 2020 or 2025.

Our universities are alarmed about the implications of Brexit, so the Government must step up to the plate to reassure rather than seek to complete what essentially would be a triple whammy, with another crackdown and a persistent failure to listen to rational arguments about a post-study work visa. One of the key underlying problems is, as the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) said, the inclusion of students in the net migration target. At best it seems inconsistent for, on the one hand, the Treasury to be targeting an increase in education exports and, on the other, the Home Office to be quite clearly seeing student numbers as a target for reductions.

To make matters worse, the Home Office appears to be motivated by international passenger survey statistics and a belief that about 90,000 students are not leaving when their courses end. That is not a good thing, because serious questions about the accuracy of those figures are now being asked not just by me, but by the UK Statistics Authority, the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, and the Institute for Public Policy Research, just by way of example. The main reason for the concerns is that the figures suggested by the Government are completely out of kilter with many other sources of information, from Home Office longitudinal studies to the destination of leavers survey and the annual population survey. We are talking about not just a few hundred students here and there, but many tens of thousands.

As the Minister will know, just a few weeks ago an article appeared in *The Times* that suggested that the Home Office has in its hands an independent analysis that shows that just 1% of international students break the terms of their visas by refusing to leave after their courses end. Sadly, as I understand it, the Home Office has refused to share that study with other Departments, never mind with MPs or the public. Perhaps the Minister will explain why.

**Mr Jim Cunningham:** Has the hon. Gentleman considered that there is another dimension to this? Universities such as the University of Warwick export knowledge to different countries. They set up various sub-universities, for want of a better term.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** That is a good point that we should bear in mind. The export of education takes the form of not just attracting international students, but physically building campuses and other institutions abroad.

I ask the Minister to explain what is happening with the study that we are not allowed to see, because that study almost certainly takes into account new exit checks, which have been in place for about 12 months. Using exit checks and cross-referencing other data sources gives us a tremendous new opportunity to get a proper handle on student migration patterns. It simply is not common sense for the Government to press ahead with new goals for reducing student numbers until such time as the assumptions on which the proposals are based are thoroughly tested.

I know from speaking with the Office for National Statistics just this morning that it is taking on a body of work to look at this issue and that it will today put some information on its website to explain the nature of that work. Will the Government therefore undertake to share the exit check data with the Office for National Statistics, which is important for its work, and will the Minister wait until that work is complete, rather than pressing ahead with any rash policy decisions?

I turn finally to the policies we need, if hon. Members agree with me that we should be going for growth. What policies would allow us to do that? The obvious first answer is that we need to up our game on post-study work offers. Post-study work is something that our competitor countries are using as a key means to attract talented international students, and they are doing it much better than us. Canada has three-year visas with no salary threshold and New Zealand has one-year visas with no salary threshold. Australia conducted a big review on the subject back in 2010, when it was beginning to struggle to attract international students, and, lo and behold, it proposed a two-year post-study visa with no salary requirement, just like we used to have here, and now it is much more competitive than we are.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the thresholds set are unrealistic for many graduates such as young post-doctorate students who would like to remain in their universities?

**Stuart C. McDonald:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I will turn later to how some of the thresholds set are unrealistic for specific sectors, and indeed specific parts of the United Kingdom.

Post-study work is attractive, and it is important in attracting international students, because for them it is an opportunity to gain priceless experience of the business environment and culture in the UK. It allows them to utilise knowledge gained from their studies in an English-speaking setting, build networks and, importantly, offset some of the costs of studying abroad. The range of voices speaking out in favour of a post-study work scheme is huge. It includes Universities Scotland; Universities UK; the Russell Group; the Scottish Government; Scottish Tories, Labour, Lib Dems and Greens; the Scottish Government's post-study work working group; the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, twice; various all-party parliamentary groups; the Select Committee on Home Affairs; the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee; the Scottish TUC; business groups; immigration lawyers; and the Cole commission on UK exports, which was asked to make a report. They are not all wrong. Even a study funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills made it clear that our failure in post-study work offers puts the UK's universities at a competitive disadvantage in attempting to recruit the best of the international student pool.

If the Government will not listen on a UK-wide basis, I repeat the call that they should allow Scotland to press ahead, as well as any other nation or region of the UK that wishes to do so. The arguments offered by the Government in response recently to the Scottish Affairs Committee did not stack up. It is not true that allowing Scotland to introduce its own post-study work scheme would harm the integrity of the UK's immigration system. We all know that other countries apply different immigration rules in different constituent parts—indeed, so has the UK. It did with the fresh talent scheme and the tech nation visa, and the plain old tier 2 permit ties visa holders, at least by implication to particular parts of the UK, so it can be done.

The Government complained that, under the fresh talent working in Scotland scheme, some people used study in Scotland as a means to move to England. The first point is, so what? Even if the numbers the Government quote are accurate—the Minister knows that the study

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

probably was not comprehensive enough for that—we are talking about tiny numbers. We are also talking about people who were doing nothing illegal or in breach of their visa, because it was not a stipulation of the visa that the person had to live and work in Scotland.

If the Minister is so worried about a couple of thousand additional graduates entering the labour force outside Scotland, he should stipulate that condition in the visa. It really is that simple. Otherwise, the message from the Government to Scotland is that the demographic challenges and skills shortages it faces do not matter and that the priority is keeping a handful of extra migrants out of other parts of the UK.

To rub salt in the wounds, I cannot say strongly enough how many bridges were burned when the Government announced that their pilot of a half-baked alternative to the post-study work scheme would be piloted only in a tiny number of English universities. Even if rolled out, that pilot scheme is not remotely competitive with what other countries are offering. It offers just four months at the end of study and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) said, the starting salary thresholds are inappropriate for certain sectors and regions. Median salaries for graduates of Scottish universities are £19,000 or lower in biological sciences; agriculture and related subjects; law; languages; and creative arts and design, which is below the threshold for a tier 2 visa.

It is not just the absence of a post-study work visa that is problematic. There are serious concerns about the credibility interviews conducted by UK Visas that essentially reassess decisions made by the universities. Subjective criteria now operate alongside the Government's decision to reduce the maximum visa refusal rates of an institution to 10%. That means that institutions are scaling back recruitment work in places from which there are higher refusal rates.

We are also alarmed at hints that a two-tier system is on its way, with visas for some universities incorporating more favourable terms and conditions than for others. All universities are quality assured—that is required by a tier 4 licence. I am therefore proud to speak up for all Scottish universities—indeed, all universities throughout the UK—and question the message that sends out.

I could speak for hours on the complexity of the application process and various other problems, but I will draw my remarks to a conclusion and leave it to other Members or for another debate to explore those issues. The key message is that international students are brilliant and we could do so much more to attract them here for the benefit of all. Government policy is misguided in the extreme and it is time for an urgent rethink. It is time to up our game and maximise our efforts to attract international students, who bring real benefits to this country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, it might be worth noting that there is a large degree of interest in the debate. While I do not intend to apply a strict time limit, none the less, will everyone be courteous to their neighbours and keep their remarks perhaps to five, seven or eight minutes, or something of that order? I think we will then fit most people in.

2.48 pm

**Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Gray. May I first congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)? I think I have pronounced that correctly. [*Interruption.*] It is always a challenge. Do not worry, I am used to “Luger-bruger”. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this excellent debate on this important subject. It is nice to see the Minister in his place; I know he will listen carefully to what we all have to say. May I apologise to the Chamber for not being able to stay for the wind-ups? I will however read the concluding remarks—particularly from the Minister—with great interest.

I am here to speak up as the Member of Parliament for Loughborough, which has a hugely successful and internationally focused university. I also recognise the other successful universities in Leicestershire, which have already been mentioned by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz): Leicester University and De Montfort University. It is fair to say that Leicester and Leicestershire Members are extremely proud of our three highly successful universities.

In my former role as Secretary of State for Education, and also as the Minister for Women and Equalities, I spent much of my time encouraging our young people to be outward looking and globally minded. That was at the heart of what the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East said about the importance of our internationally facing universities and higher education institutions to all of this country.

Given the interest in the debate, I will keep my remarks to two main points: first, numbers, and whether it is right to include students in the reduction in migrants to tens of thousands per year, and, secondly, the benefits of universities. I think the debate also speaks to a wider issue that we are grappling with as a Parliament at the moment, which is the kind of country we want to be after the referendum on 23 June. I firmly feel, and I suspect—or hope—that many Members agree, that we do not want to turn our backs on the world. If we were somehow to harm or to disable our higher education institutions, we are at grave risk of doing just that.

**Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab):** People of intelligence and good will voted both for and against Brexit. Does the right hon. Lady agree that many people are now frightened by some of the rhetoric they have heard around Brexit, and that it is the responsibility of the House to allay those fears?

**Nicky Morgan:** I agree with the hon. Lady. There has been some very unfortunate rhetoric, and I am sad to say that we have even had incidents—I know of at least one—on the campus of Loughborough University, in my constituency, whereby those who have come from abroad to work or study have been made to feel unwelcome. I do not think that is the kind of country any of us want to represent.

**Keith Vaz:** The right hon. Lady was a distinguished Education Secretary, and whenever she spoke on these issues it was about getting more students to study in our country. Now that she is no longer the Education Secretary, can I tempt her to confirm the rumour we heard at the time she was: her Department was in favour of more students coming here, the Foreign Office was in favour

of more students coming, the Business Department was in favour of more students coming—it was only the Home Office that spoiled the party. Will she confirm whether that was the case?

**Nicky Morgan:** The right hon. Gentleman is an old hand in the House. He knows he is tempting me down paths that are always dangerous for former Ministers to follow. I will say that this former Secretary of State for Education was very much in favour of making sure that our higher education institutions were open to international students, because we are at our best when we are outward looking. It is fair to say that there were certainly other Ministers who very much shared that view.

I hope the Minister will confirm that the Government are relying on reliable numbers when drafting their immigration policy. The annual population survey suggests that only around 30,000 to 40,000 non-EU migrants who previously came as students are still in the UK after five years. The rules introduced by the Home Office over the past six years have done the right thing in cracking down on abuses by those who came here for the wrong reason—not to study but to work without the requisite permission. However, we have to be careful that the rules do not adversely affect genuine students and institutions, and do not undermine the UK's reputation as a desirable destination for international students.

I will also talk about public opinion, because it is important in the current immigration debate. We know that many of our constituents want immigration to be controlled. I think that means that we should know who is coming in, how long they are coming in for, why they are coming in and at what point, if any, they are going to be leaving, or whether are we going to get the benefit of their skills once they have finished their studies.

Recent polling from Universities UK and ComRes revealed that only 24% of British adults think of international students as immigrants. Of those who expressed a view in the poll, 75% said they would like to see the same number or more international students in the UK, which increased to 87% once information on the economic benefits of international students was provided. The poll also revealed that the overwhelming majority of the British public—91%—think that international students should be able to stay and work in the UK for a period of time after they have completed their studies.

In the interests of time, I will move on to my second point about the benefits that universities bring to our local communities, which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East set out very well. Of course, as I am constantly reminded by Loughborough, we should not forget that our universities are not just about teaching, although that is important, but about research and driving economic growth in our local areas. All three Leicestershire universities that I have mentioned are key parts of our local enterprise partnerships and, I suspect, should be key parts of the Government's industrial strategy when that is announced.

The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East talked about the contribution that universities make to our local areas. The international education sector is one of the UK's biggest services exports, and I hope that the Department for Exiting the European Union listens very closely to what universities and higher education have to say on the deal that we will eventually negotiate with the European Union.

UK education exports are estimated to be worth approximately £17.5 billion to the UK economy. International students, including EU students, support 170,000 full-time equivalent jobs across the UK and contribute £9 billion.

Those are big numbers but, if we boil it down, I know as a local Member of Parliament that my constituents are employed as researchers and academics, but also in less skilled jobs—the people who make the campus the place it is, who look after the students and who run businesses and other institutions, such as retailers, that rely on the student contribution to their local economy.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree that the contribution that EU students make is absolutely crucial and, as we approach Brexit, a particular signal of reassurance has to be given? There is already evidence that researchers and students are apprehensive about their future in the UK, post-Brexit.

**Nicky Morgan:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Leicestershire (Alberto Costa) who asked the Prime Minister a very good question earlier. I have said publicly and will say again that the Government should be giving confirmation to EU citizens who are currently here that they can stay and should have no fear of being asked to leave. My constituents have emailed me—some of whom are EU citizens who have come here to work; some of whom are married to or have other family members who are EU citizens—and I think it is wrong that we are leaving them with this uncertainty.

I very much hope that student numbers will be removed from the drive to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands, for the reason I have given about public opinion, as well as because it is the right thing to do for our economy. In the next couple of years, the Home Office has the opportunity to develop a new, post-Brexit immigration policy. I know that will be a challenge, but there is also an opportunity to remove student numbers from that drive to reduce net migration to the tens of thousands, as we develop a sensible immigration policy that works for this country, for businesses, for communities and for our higher education institutions. Again, I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East on bringing the debate to the Chamber.

2.58 pm

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): I am delighted to follow the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), who made a powerful case with which I know many Members of her party, and indeed many Members across the House, agree. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing the debate and on the powerful case he made, too.

I rise to speak as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on international students—a job that I share with Lord Bilimoria, who joined the Prime Minister last week on a mission to India. I think a lot of people on that mission learned something about the relationship between trade agreements and issues relating to students, after the Indian Government made it clear that our future relationship depended on our taking a different view on international students.

[Paul Blomfield]

Our all-party parliamentary group draws support from both Government and Opposition Members in significant numbers. It was set up during this Parliament because of growing concern about the way in which we are at risk of undermining one of our most successful export industries: education. Clearly, we should not reduce the debate about international students to simple numbers—although some powerful numbers have been given.

International students enrich the learning environment of our campuses. In an ever smaller world in which we need to understand one another better, it is a huge advantage for British students to be learning in classrooms and laboratories alongside others from all over the world. International students add enormously to the research capacity of our universities, with benefits to local economies, as I know from talking to businesses in Sheffield that appreciate their contribution.

We can add to that the enormous benefits we get from the lasting relationships that are established through the experience of studying here. I was talking earlier this year to the high commissioner of one of our major trading partners and important allies, and he said to me, “Did you know that more than half our Cabinet went to university in the UK?” As the Higher Education Policy Institute points out, 55 world leaders from 51 countries studied in this country. That sort of soft power is the envy of countries around the world, with political influence and commercial contracts based on an affection that people feel for this country because they studied here. Of course, we also have to acknowledge the economic benefits, which the right hon. Member for Loughborough outlined.

Who would imagine that a Government would do anything other than celebrate that great British success? It has not been so. Throughout the last Parliament, to growing concern, the Government undermined our ability to recruit international students. I know that Ministers sometimes contest the claim about recruitment numbers—I anticipate that the Minister may do so today—by saying that they have broadly held level. With the exception of one blip in one year, that is true, but it is a growing market. Holding level is not good enough. It means we are reducing market share, to the benefit of our competitors.

In the last year for which figures are available, the number of international students was up 7% in the States and up 8% in Australia, and Canada plans to double its numbers. That is all at our expense, and it is because of the measures under the previous Parliament that made the UK a less attractive destination. Those measures were put in place by the Government to hit their net migration targets, and that is the problem; international students were viewed as part of the migration debate. That is not the way the public see them, as the right hon. Lady pointed out, and it is not the way that we in this place see them either. An unprecedented five Select Committees of the Commons and the Lords have called for change by taking students out of net migration targets and seeing them as valuable, not something to be restricted.

Instead, the Government are stepping up their action against international students. In her speech to the Conservative party conference last month, the Home Secretary put international students at the centre of her plans to cut migration. She introduced a new tool with

which she plans to do that: linking visa approval to the quality of courses. It is perhaps no coincidence that the Government are introducing a teaching excellence framework for our universities, grading universities gold, silver or bronze. I hope that in his closing remarks, the Minister will confirm whether it is the Home Office’s intention to use that system of measuring quality to determine the new visa regime it has in mind. If not, will he confirm that the Home Office plans to introduce its own measurement of the quality of our universities? He will not be surprised to know that if he uses TEF, some surprising universities will lose out. University College London and the London School of Economics—both leading universities—would not necessarily get the gold measure.

These are challenging times for our country. Charting our place in the post-Brexit world presents real challenges. We need to win friends, not alienate them. Last week’s prime ministerial mission to India demonstrated that many of our friends will put access to universities at the heart of the discussion on our future relationship. Above all, we need to build on our successful sectors, to mitigate the economic damage of Brexit. In terms of export earnings, universities are a huge success, but that is put at risk by Brexit. It is not only the 185,000 EU students in the country but the 30% of non-EU students who said before the referendum on 23 June that they would find the UK a less attractive country if we voted to leave the European Union.

As the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East said, a sensible Government would look at those facts and say, “How can we strengthen our position in the world? How can we do better against our competitors? How can we up our game?” Instead, the Home Secretary is moving in the other direction. That is madness. There is no other sector in our economy to which the Government would be saying, “We want you to do less well.” I hope that the Minister will reflect on all the contributions today and all the concern outside this place and say that the Government are willing to think again, to up our game, to learn from our competitors and to celebrate winning more international students to this country as a policy objective.

3.6 pm

**John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on starting this important debate. I begin with a declaration of interest: I have benefited from international students very directly in the past few months. A Mexican postgraduate engineer called Alfredo helped me to analyse the complex business cases that the Department for Transport uses, and he was extraordinarily helpful. I also had a Swiss postgrad on an LSE scheme help me to expose some of the limitations of the northern powerhouse project and provide the office with useful chocolate, including proper Toblerone.

Debates such as this follow a customary pattern. The proposer adopts a cloak of virtue and expects the Government to do something, and the Government then point out all the practicalities, financial limitations and reasons why they cannot do what the proposer suggests. The proposer is normally the hero, and the Government are normally the villain—the Minister has to, in effect, act that part. However, there is a real opportunity for him to be the hero.

There is a Conservative Government with a progressive policy to attract international students. They lambast in press publicity their socialist predecessor for not doing enough, have a 10-year plan for international students and are aggressively building the skills base by attracting the brightest international talent. That Government are in Australia. There is equally—this is not a good example, because I might be prejudiced—a Liberal Government in Canada that are doing something rather similar.

Being sensible about it, I think we all agree that universities gain from a clear international dimension, with bright people from other countries contributing enormously to our academic culture and to important research areas where we do not have the research expertise ourselves. The world gains enormously from having an involvement with British universities, at no cost to us. It is a good thing, and nobody around the table would say anything different.

There appear to be only two problems, and one of them is within the Minister's grasp to solve. Student numbers are cited as a problem, in terms of how they feature in net migration and add to the anxiety about immigration. I think most sensible people see that as purely a presentational or cosmetic problem. It is quite clear, from the polling evidence produced by the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), that the public do not see it that way at all when it is properly explained to them. The second worry, which is the more pertinent one as far as the Minister is concerned, is that study is actually used as a device for securing permanent access to the country.

The first problem is soluble. It is a non-problem. I understand concerns about how the Office for National Statistics does stats and so on, but frankly, when previous Governments were troubled by how accurate a reflection of unemployment the employment statistics were, they changed them. Within recent memory, the Government changed the assessment on child poverty because it and the way in which it was presented were wrong. The Government can change this.

The second problem, of study being used as a device to enter the country or stay permanently in the country, may not be a real problem—not if there is adequate quality control on HE. It looks from forthcoming legislation as if there may be less of that, but there was a clear clampdown on bogus colleges. I do not think we need to worry excessively about that. The issue may not be a problem because we have no good numbers on it. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East cited the IPPR report that refers to a secret report in the Home Office that says it is not a problem. Maybe the Minister will talk a little—of course he cannot—about this secret report. He is going to.

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** It is so secret that not even I have seen it, if it exists.

**John Pugh:** Okay. I am grateful to hear that. The issue may not be a problem because when we think about it objectively, somebody who masters English, having not started out with English as their native tongue, and who has qualified in a good British university, may be precisely the sort of person the country needs.

None the less, I accept that, generally speaking, the Government, the public, the world distinguish between admission for study and admission for work, and they

are two different things. The problem is that in this country we allow anxieties about the latter to completely screw up the former, if I can use that as parliamentary language, Mr Gray; I probably cannot.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** There is no rule against it.

**John Pugh:** Hence the conflict that rides through Government between the Home Office and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and between the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, who clearly has a different opinion. Hence we see the significance that higher education has for Brexit not only from the money point of view but because courses will fall over and research will simply not be done.

I am not going to volunteer an elegant solution to managing the position between admission for work and admission for study. It is a choice between whatever the Government want to do—summary rejection or complete inertia. However, I will make a simple point that most people would want to make. The Government can make life easy for themselves—they really can—by following business advice, public instinct and academic argument and publicly differentiate the student and the migrant.

3.11 pm

**Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing this debate. I apologise if I have to leave before the end—I will be a Teller at the end of the debate in the main Chamber—but hopefully that will not be necessary. I do not want to speak for long; I just want to make a few short remarks urging the Government to listen to our universities and to ensure that international students continue to feel welcome in the UK. Following the vote to leave the EU and the Government's rhetoric on visa restrictions, there is a real and justifiable worry about the future of international students in the UK.

As a Manchester MP, I am proud that we have a university where one in five students is from overseas, many of whom live in my constituency. Ahead of this debate, the University of Manchester was keen to impress on me the great contribution that international students make to the wealth and cultural life of our city. The figures are varied, but I think we can all agree that international students generate more than £9 billion to the UK economy and at least 140,000 jobs. An international student who studies in Britain is an investment in the future of UK research and innovation. According to the British Council, 45% of early career researchers are from overseas. These are some of the people who become our international academic staff, who help to maintain our world-beating reputation for higher education.

At the same time, demand from international students on our public services is relatively limited. Non-EU students have no access to benefits and students generally are far younger and healthier than the population as a whole.

**Mr Andrew Smith:** Going back to the statistics that my hon. Friend mentioned, the proportion of overseas students at post-doctoral level in disciplines such as science and engineering exceeds 70%, so if the income

[Mr Andrew Smith]

and the expertise they bring were to go, there is a real risk that those departments, or parts of them, would close.

**Jeff Smith:** My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point; that is a real risk. When we talk about immigration numbers, the public recognise the value of international students. They do not consider international students as immigrants. It is not often that I agree wholeheartedly with the right hon. Member for Loughborough (Nicky Morgan), but she was absolutely right to quote the Universities UK study. Clearly, the British public think that international students should be able to stay and work for a period after studying, so the Home Secretary's comments about new restrictions on overseas students are a real worry, particularly at a time when there is already uncertainty as a result of the referendum.

Leaving the EU will pose a real threat to our universities and students. Although I welcome the short-term funding guarantees for EU students and staff, there needs to be a longer-term solution, and the Government have to prioritise the free arrangements for the academic community in the upcoming negotiations because the indecision is already causing problems. I was talking to an academic, an EU national, who works at the University of Manchester. He said to me, "I love living in Manchester. I love my job. I don't want to move abroad, but I don't know what the future holds." He had been offered a job at a German university. He said, "For the first time in my life I am considering leaving the job I love in Manchester because I can be more certain of my future in Germany." That is a real concern for the academic community and for us in the UK, because we cannot afford to lose talent.

Prioritising the post-Brexit study arrangements for EU students and academics has to be a vital first step. However, at a time when the Government need to reassure the higher education sector that the UK will remain outward-looking, they appear to be pulling up the drawbridge on international students. The focus on bringing net migration down to the tens of thousands may or may not be workable. I suspect it is unworkable, and it is certainly damaging our universities while students are included in that number.

The IPPR has argued that the Government are treating students as an easy target in their mission to bring net migration down. It has called the Government's approach "deeply problematic". We need only look at some of our international competitors to see what they are doing in contrast. I will give two examples. In April, Australia announced a new national strategy for expanding its international education sector and has streamlined its visa processes. Canada has recently expanded opportunities for international students to access post-study work and permanent residency. It is time the Government learnt the lessons from our competitors and welcomed international students instead of putting extra visa restrictions on them.

I want to close with three or four asks for what the Government should do immediately to reassure our higher education sector.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** Quite quick ones.

**Jeff Smith:** I will be very quick; in fact, I will read the bullet points. First, the Government need to remove international students from the net migration target. Secondly, the Government need to reintroduce the post-study work visa for STEM and nursing graduates. Thirdly, they need to rethink proposals to introduce visa restrictions. Finally, the Government really need to publicly acknowledge that the ability of students and university staff from the EU to study and work freely in this country is integral to the world-beating university education system that we have.

International students make a huge contribution to our academic life and our society. The Government need to welcome them, not discourage them.

3.18 pm

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): It must be because you were at school in my constituency that you have selected me to speak, Mr Gray, so I appreciate that.

**Mr James Gray (in the Chair):** Order. I would like to have played some part in that, but sadly I was not consulted on the matter.

**Carol Monaghan:** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for securing this debate. This week is a celebration of the richness and diversity that international students from Europe or further afield bring to our communities. Unfortunately, the current mood music when it comes to international students is wrong. More and more, the UK is being seen as unwelcoming or even hostile to those students. The reputational damage done by Brexit cannot be overestimated. If we add to that our restrictive visa regime, countries such as the US, Canada and Australia become far more attractive. It should not be a question of us allowing talented students to come here; the Government need to actively campaign to bring them here. If the UK is to remain a world leader in education, we need to recognise the effects of current Home Office policy and move towards a more workable solution. Professor Philip Nelson, the chair of Research Councils UK, told the Select Committee on Science and Technology recently that

"all of those wonderful achievements that we can all cite about the UK are done by people from a range of nationalities in this country. UK science is not done by UK nationals. It is done by many people."

The visa process itself should be straightforward, but I had a look at the Home Office website this morning and it gives an indication of the length of time a visa application should take. According to the site, a tier 4 visa application—the simplest student application—from India should take 15 days to process. Unfortunately, that is not a true reflection. I have had reports of applications taking months without a response. We need to be realistic about how long it takes. Visas for short research visits of, say, a few weeks or months—much like those that many UK-based students might make, such as a short spell at CERN—can take so long to process that the research opportunity is lost before the visa is approved. The Government must recognise that research is an international endeavour and a key part of it is getting worldwide access to facilities. There is a need for a workable mechanism that allows international students to come easily to the UK for those short visits.

The new post-study work visa pilot has been viewed with interest. However, in Scotland, where a previous version worked extremely well, our universities have been excluded. That is in a country with an ageing population and where our problem is emigration, not immigration. Post-study work visas could go a long way in tackling skills shortages, particularly in digital and STEM industries. Instead, our institutions are investing in training those students, only for them to return home, taking their newly acquired skills with them, benefiting their home countries but not, crucially, our communities. Scotland, as well as many excellent UK institutions, has been left out of the pilot. I and many of my colleagues have asked questions on the issue. Indeed, on 14 November I asked, at column 5, when we could expect the pilot to be widened to include Scotland. Perhaps the Minister can answer that question today.

We could argue that universities are still managing, but the Brexit process brings the issue of international students clearly into focus. Will the restrictive regimes currently operating be relaxed at all when French or indeed Irish students apply to study here? Section 2 of the Ireland Act 1949 states that Ireland is not a foreign country. Perhaps the Minister could tell me how Irish students will be considered following Brexit.

3.22 pm

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing the debate. There has been an enormous degree of unanimity, and the economic arguments have already been well articulated, so I will not try to repeat them. However, there is one element of the economic argument that I have not yet heard, but which is highly relevant to the debate. As a representative of a manufacturing area, I know that engineering and digital skills are crucial to our future manufacturing success.

Universities have great difficulty in recruiting enough students domestically to fill the available courses. A high proportion of international students take up those courses. To deter such students from coming here to take our world-class courses or working here after graduating makes no sense. That policy deprives manufacturing industry of much needed, crucial strategic skills for the future, which would enable our manufacturing to survive in a post-Brexit economy. It also undermines many university courses, because the funding from international students is crucial to maintaining them. They may not be able to get enough domestic students, and the courses are disproportionately expensive. That is a further reason to have a visa regime that continues to encourage students of STEM subjects.

In a previous incarnation I was the Chair of the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills. We produced a report on this matter in September 2012, which other hon. Members have mentioned. It was unanimous, and was among several other Select Committee reports that, I believe, unanimously reached the same conclusion: that student visas should not be included in the migration statistics. During interviews with the respective Ministers it became clear that the Home Office and BIS had conflicting views. I think I can paraphrase the Home Office approach by saying that it depended on

the United Nations definition, under which a migrant is a person who moves for a period of at least one year to a country other than their country of origin. That is an international tool for comparing migration, but as a basis for public policy it is totally inadequate.

It is interesting that both the USA and Australia—countries that are very concerned about inward migration—have, as it were, finessed the same approach to accommodate an increase in the number of student visas. The US uses the Census Bureau to give numbers, but the Department of Homeland Security treats students as business visitors and tourists—non-immigrant admissions. There is a compelling logic for doing that in this country. Unfortunately, although the logic is evident in every other Department, across the parties and among the public—and public support for the policy has been commented on—that does not seem to be the case in the Home Office. The issue has enormous strategic significance for our post-Brexit experience and trade deals. I should like to elaborate, but in the interest of brevity I shall conclude my remarks there, Mr Gray.

3.27 pm

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship once again, Mr Gray. I am changing the speech that I was going to make, as there have been such fine contributions from everyone. I shall just highlight issues from my personal experience.

In the early days of Namibian independence, I went along to do an assignment on capacity building. I went, as I was asked, to the office of the Prime Minister, where I was met by his senior adviser, who said to me—I think I can do his accent just about perfectly—“Roger, delighted to meet you. How are Glasgow Rangers getting on?” That came as a great shock to me, as an Ayr United supporter. He had spent eight years studying in Glasgow and had two degrees, and after independence he returned to his country.

A short time later, I was at the new University of Namibia, where I was to give some help. There I met the wonderful Professor Peter Katjavivi, who was here recently. He is now the Speaker of the Namibian Parliament. Peter set up the first South West Africa People’s Organisation office in Europe—in London—and when he was here, for years, eventually completed his PhD at Oxford. Some time later, I met a man for whom eventually I would be the best man at his wedding. He is now the permanent secretary to the President of Namibia. His name is Samuel /Goagoseb—I pronounce the forward click for the benefit of *Hansard*. Samuel was partly educated at Heriot-Watt University in Scotland. My experience was just a small personal example of the way we have exported such talent, to great benefit, throughout the world, but I fear that those people might not be able to get access today in an equivalent way, under the types of regimes that we operate.

I also have the pleasure of continuing as an honorary professor at the University of Stirling. I used to teach there on MBA and MSc programmes. These masters programmes at Stirling University benefited hugely, particularly from the many students from India. There has been an utter collapse in the number of students from India coming to our universities. That has led in some cases to the cancellation of previously very well regarded programmes.

[Roger Mullin]

I used to sit as the chair of an interdepartmental ethics committee—it took a long time and a lot of practice to say that—and I came across many researchers at Stirling University. I cannot remember a single research proposal that did not involve someone from beyond the UK. International students were fundamentally important to our research capability and to assisting us in having the diverse education from which everyone in the UK benefits.

I appeal to the Minister to listen to the facts and figures he has heard today and to consider the qualitative benefit that encouraging international students brings to our country.

3.30 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing this debate. The issue affects many people in my constituency and certainly needs attention. Like other hon. Members here, I believe in education. I believe that those with a vocation should be facilitated to learn their trade or skill, that those who are desirous of learning should be enabled to do that and that those who can bring skills to our economy must be able to do so. I believe that our universities must be able to welcome foreign students, with the higher tuition they bring, and that they should be in a position to facilitate higher learning.

But in all of this, I believe we should not be taken advantage of. Something the Prime Minister said when she was Home Secretary sticks in my memory:

“We want the best international graduates to stay and contribute to the UK economy. However, the arrangements that we have been left with for students who graduate in the UK are far too generous. They are able to stay for two years, whether or not they find a job and regardless of the skill level of that job. In 2010, when one in 10 UK graduates were unemployed, 39,000 non-EU students with 8,000 dependants took advantage of that generosity.

We will therefore close the current post-study work route from April next year. In future, only graduates who have an offer of a skilled graduate-level job from an employer licensed by the UK Border Agency will be allowed to stay.”—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 855.]

That does not seem to be unfair. It is our responsibility to provide the highest levels of our education to our own constituents and graduates who are unemployed. It is our privilege to offer the highest level of education to others who want to study in some of the best universities in the world but, with respect, it is not our responsibility to continue to cater for them to the detriment of our own economy.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jim Shannon:** I cannot give way because the Chairman was very clear about time.

Queen’s University Belfast is an example of some of the good work, student exchange participation, and research and investigation into new drugs that takes place. The wealth of talent from overseas enables us to do that great work. Our medical staff are greatly enhanced by those junior doctors, or registrars, from other countries and they could not do without them. I am thankful that that work takes place, but it will not stop because things have been tightened up. It will merely stop our groaning

system from being further burdened by responsibilities that are not ours to bear. I understand the need to tighten up some of the controls.

I welcome the fact that Brexit presents the opportunity to find terms of international study that suit students and the higher education institutions without impacting on the decision to ensure that we do not adversely affect our economy. I understand how the uncertainty of Brexit may impact on those who want to come here to live and to educate themselves, and I am sure that American universities are facing similar uncertainties, but this is not the end of international students. It is the beginning of teamwork to promote our universities and the benefits of coming here to work and study. Brexit does not signify the death knell, as I and others have said in recent days. It presents opportunities, and the universities can and must be part of this process. We must put in place agreements to promote our universities and allow visas for students, but the correct standards must apply.

I understand that India and other nations want a change to the system, and it is essential that we work with them as much as possible to provide an accessible system. It must never be forgotten that visas are a protection for us. During her visit to India, the Prime Minister indicated that she was looking at student visas for those from India, and that is important. Our universities want foreign students, foreign students want our universities and our Government want to facilitate this. We must find a balance between that and our security. There is a way and the Home Office must find it. The Home Secretary must outline how that balance will be struck and the Brexit team must deliver the negotiation of agreements to enhance and support European uptake.

3.35 pm

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing such an important and timely debate. What we have heard so far proves that students contribute not only to higher institutions, but to our economy. As my hon. Friend said, international students’ day tomorrow—17 November—is an opportunity for the Government to make students their priority. The economic benefits in research, employment and opportunities for trade and international alliances have been well versed by all my colleagues in the Chamber. Our institutions in Scotland and throughout the UK are world renowned and attract the brightest and the best. We should celebrate that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) highlighted how the unrealistic thresholds and the crude way in which we are seeking to reduce immigration figures simply do not serve our constituencies or local communities well. The reputational damage to institutions and the UK globally will not be forgotten for a long time, when the brightest and the best—those who could find a cure for cancer or any number of illnesses—are unable to secure places at Oxford, Cambridge, Glasgow, St Andrew’s and elsewhere because they cannot secure the visas they need to come to our best institutions.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): My hon. Friend and I share campuses of the West of Scotland University, whose principal is Australian.

Does she agree with him, as I do, when he says the Government's proposal to restrict universities from recruiting overseas students is an ill-considered and retrograde step that will damage our economy, our competitiveness and our cultural standing?

**Angela Crawley:** Indeed. I thank my hon. Friend for his comment. I will come to the West of Scotland University.

Our advantage is that we are a world-leading country and we have world-leading institutions. I call on the Government to make the necessary practical changes and to look at the pilot scheme, the tier 2 visa, the work study visa and so on, and to consider how much more there is to be gained from bringing the brightest and the best to our country and retaining them than there is from sending them elsewhere.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) has fascinating stories to tell. Unfortunately, my stories from Stirling University are slightly different, and I do not think the songs I learned are fit for *Hansard*, so I will move on.

International students matter, and we have heard about the direct impact that the Government's policies can have on the prosperity of constituencies such as mine. My home town of Hamilton is rich in heritage and once had a thriving town centre. Only two weeks ago, I launched a joint consultation with my Scottish Parliament counterpart on the need to take action on town centre regeneration and to consider the importance of Hamilton being a university town, where Lanarkshire's only university is located. However, like many communities across the UK, there are challenges because town centres and institutions with a student population and employment generate the local economy, but that is dwindling. This is in no small part due to the Government's policies.

One saving grace is that the student population of universities, and particularly the West of Scotland University, enhances the town and the environment. I studied as an undergraduate at Stirling University, which is a fine example of a thriving university town. I also went to the world renowned Glasgow University—something I share with you, Mr Gray. As a group, students contribute to the local economy. It is clear that where there is a university institution, the local economy benefits. The financial contribution is huge, and we need more students, particularly those who live in or close to student accommodation and spend time in town centres. There is a direct benefit to the economy, and we must not forget that.

Every year, the University of the West of Scotland welcomes more than 1,000 international students from 65 different countries around the world. In Hamilton, students contribute £69 million to the local economy. Recently, when the university took the decision to move to a new campus, it was clear that this expansion was with a view to attracting more international investment. In a letter to me, the university's principal, Craig Mahoney, said that the Government's plan

“would be significantly damaging the University of the West of Scotland and the wider Scottish and UK higher education system”.

I therefore call on the Minister to please consider the concerns raised by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. In a world of uncertainty, all Governments

must provide leadership. The proposal also sends a message of exclusion at a time when language must be about inclusion.

3.40 pm

**Ms Diane Abbott** (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumberland, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing this very important debate. It gives me great pleasure to place it on the record that Her Majesty's Opposition believe that we should remove international students from Home Office migration statistics. The purpose of that policy, apart from making the stats more accurate in relation to people who are subject to immigration legislation, is to contribute to the detoxification of this area of British society and political life, beginning with the obvious benefit to our university sector. Of course, as hon. Members have said over and over again, the truth about international students is that, far from being a burden, they make this country better off in innumerable economic, social and philosophical ways.

We have heard that there were 436,000 students from overseas in the UK in 2014-15 and that they comprised 19% of the total. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—I bow to the Department for BIS, although I know that there are different figures—estimated that the economic value of the contribution from international students was £14 billion in 2014-15 and was set to rise to £26 billion in 2025. As the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) said, this is not just about what they pay in fees; it is their financial contribution and their contribution to growth and GDP in many of our great cities. The presence of overseas students creates more than 250,000 jobs here.

The Home Secretary and her predecessor have claimed, falsely, that very large numbers of international students overstay their visas and so contribute significantly to the breach of their immigration target. They have yet to validate that claim. The most recent legal case collapsed in the Appeal Court as the Home Office attempted to use hearsay evidence that students had fraudulently obtained English qualifications. It has to be stressed that the vast majority of students return home after study. In 2014-15, fewer than 6,000 students applied for a tier 2 visa, applicable to non-EU students who wish to stay here, and that 6,000 may actually be too few for the overall needs of the economy. As I think many hon. Members know, an unpublished report from the Home Office, drafted when the Prime Minister was Home Secretary, seemed to show that the number of student overstayers is tiny, just 1% of the total—approximately 1,500. Therefore, they make no significant impact on overall immigration numbers.

**Keith Vaz:** Ministers in the past have said that one problem has been the abuse that overseas students have been involved in, yet we have seen little evidence to support that. We heard about one student working on the checkout at Tesco from a previous Immigration Minister, who is now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, but we have had no evidence. If there is evidence, it should be brought forward.

**Ms Abbott:** I am grateful to the distinguished former Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs for making that point.

[Ms Abbott]

Several stakeholders oppose what is happening. They include Universities UK, the teaching unions, the National Union of Students and many local authorities where education is a much-needed growth industry—cities such as Sheffield and Coventry. This is not just about the top 10 or Russell Group universities; our university sector benefits in so many ways from the contribution of international students.

If international student numbers are reduced in the way that Ministers seem to want, there will be a funding shortfall for universities and, as colleagues have said, courses for which international students make up a disproportionate number of the students may be imperilled. The Government's policy on international students, with its financial implications, implies either further Government borrowing, which I do not find credible, or increased fees for UK-born students.

I understand that the Chancellor of the Exchequer recently floated the idea of excluding international students from the figures only to be slapped down by the Prime Minister. Despite that, the Conservative hon. Member for Bath (Ben Howlett) has written that the “smart” thing to do is to exclude international students from the migration statistics. On this issue, it appears that the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary are on their own.

As we have heard, polls consistently show a majority in favour of excluding international students from the migration statistics; typically 60% are in favour and 30% against. As a follow-up, we should look at reforming the policy on tier 2 visa applications, to make it easier for non-EU graduates to work here in sectors that require them, whether they are doctors or IT specialists.

Let me say just a few words on India. As we have heard, the number of overseas students from India has plummeted as a consequence of both the rhetoric and the policies of this Government. The Prime Minister, I think to her surprise, on her recent visit to India, realised that there was great concern about the situation in relation to its students in the UK. That was at the heart of the negotiations. And what did the Prime Minister offer? Golden visas for the super-wealthy. There was no attempt to address the real concerns of Government and society in India about the way we are talking about and treating international students. It is an entirely self-defeating policy. Indian students do not want to stay on. They come here because it is one of the best education systems in the world and then they probably go to Silicon Valley. The Minister may be aware that the chief executive officer of Google is Indian; that is the path to fame and fortune for Indian students. We should be glad that they recognise the quality of our education and want to come here to study at least.

Earlier today, the Minister expressed concern that no one was leading on immigration for Her Majesty's Opposition. I can tell him that we do have someone leading. It is the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington, the shadow Home Secretary. The Minister seemed to wonder why I would bother my head with immigration. I do bother my head with immigration and I am happy and proud to lead on it. Over nearly 30 years, I have consistently been in the top 10 of MPs dealing with immigration casework. With the solitary exception of my good and right hon. Friend the Member

for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), I have probably done more immigration casework, under both Labour and Conservative Ministers, than anyone in the Chamber today. I bother my head with immigration because I am the child of immigrants, and I am committed to a debate on immigration, on both sides of the House, that is based on fact, that puts the economy, society and British values first and that is not driven by short-term political concerns—I say that to all Members. It is a concern of mine; it is a concern of my constituents. Whether or not many millions of people up and down the country are frightened by the current tenor of the debate on immigration, both here and in the US, it is a concern of mine—it is a long-standing interest of mine—and I am proud to say that as shadow Home Secretary, I do indeed lead on immigration.

3.48 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) on securing the debate and I thank all hon. Members who participated in it for their worthwhile, considered and thoughtful contributions on such a wide-reaching and important topic. I think that we can all agree that it is in the best interests of the UK as a whole to ensure that the United Kingdom continues to attract the best and brightest international students to study here. High quality international students make an important contribution to the UK. Our universities are strengthened by the presence of some of the finest minds from around the world, and the international students themselves benefit from the chance to receive an education at some of the world's best educational institutions.

Much emphasis has been placed today on the desire for Scotland to re-establish a post-study work visa. Hon. Members may remember the Fresh Talent scheme that operated in Scotland between 2004 and 2008. That scheme placed few restrictions on those who wanted to stay in the UK to work post-study, and granted free access to the whole of the UK labour market. An evidence reviewed published by Scottish Government Social Research in 2008 found that only 44% of applicants had remained in Scotland at the end of their two years' leave on the scheme, and a significant proportion were not in skilled work appropriate to the level of education.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** That is exactly the point I made during my speech and I suggested that it is made a condition of a post-study work visa that that person has to live and work in Scotland. That would absolutely solve the Minister's concerns.

**Mr Goodwill:** It is very difficult to ensure that a person who gets a visa to work, potentially, in Scotland is stopped from travelling elsewhere in the UK. Certainly, the pull of the south-east and London is one we are all too well aware of.

In 2008, the tier 1 post-study work visa replaced the Fresh Talent scheme and was introduced country-wide. This route saw high levels of abuse, with evidence of large numbers of fraudulent applications and individuals deliberately using the student route solely as an avenue to work in the UK, with no intention to study and many in unskilled work. I am sure that hon. Members are not seriously suggesting that a return to a completely open

post-study work route that does not lead to skilled work would be advantageous for any part of the United Kingdom.

The UK already has an attractive offer for international graduates of UK universities. Those who can find a skilled job are free to do so. There is no limit to the number of tier 4 students who can move to a tier 2 general skilled worker route, nor do they count against the annual tier 2 cap. Around 6,000 tier 4 international students move to tier 2 annually, and that number has been rising year on year. However, that does not mean that the Government do not remain open to keeping our offer for international students under constant review, to ensure that we help our renowned institutions to attract talent from around the world. One such recent development was the launch of the tier 4 visa pilot with the universities of Bath, Cambridge, Oxford and Imperial College in July.

**Roger Mullin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Goodwill:** I suspect I am going to answer the hon. Gentleman's question before he raises it. May I take this opportunity to reassure hon. Members that those institutions were chosen because of their consistently low visa refusal rates, lest anyone imagines we might have a conspiracy against Scotland?

**Roger Mullin:** On the conspiracy the Minister has against Scotland, would he clarify which Scottish universities he thinks did not operate appropriately and reasonably regarding students? Name them, or apologise.

**Mr Goodwill:** I am not aware of any Scottish universities that are not operating within the rules, but the four chosen for the pilot were those with the best performance in terms of their visa refusal rates. Indeed, the whole point of the pilot is to find out the benefits and advantages so that it can be rolled out more generally. I know that a number of Scottish universities, such as the University of Glasgow, which has increased its overseas non-EU student numbers by 32% between 2012 and 2015, are just the sorts of institutions that have shown how successful they can be in attracting overseas students.

As part of this pilot, certain visa eligibility checks have been delegated to the universities, and the documentary requirements for students taking part are reduced. The students also have additional leave at the end of their course to enable them to take advantage of the UK's current post-study work offer. Monitoring of the pilot is ongoing, and the results of that will be evaluated to inform any decision to roll the pilot out more widely. But, if it is a success, I hope that other high quality institutions throughout the UK will be able to benefit, including those—I am sure the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East will be glad to hear—in Scotland, and, I hope, also in Yorkshire.

Any change for the best-performing institutions will build upon the excellent offer that the United Kingdom already has for international students, with the intention of allowing the UK to remain the second most popular destination in the world for international higher education students, behind only the United States of America. Our approach to reform continues to strive towards two key goals: first, to ensure that our fantastic institutions can attract the very best and brightest students from

around the world, and secondly, to protect the student migration route from abuse. I am sure that hon. Members here today can agree that this is a sound foundation on which to build.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Before the Minister moves on to his next chapter, I would like to go back to the intervention made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) about the possibility of attaching the condition that students could work only in Scotland. Is the Minister aware that Scotland has a distinctive tax code to reflect Holyrood's tax powers, and that it is therefore very easy to keep track of whether or not somebody is working in Scotland?

**Mr Goodwill:** It is very important, throughout the whole immigration system, that people who have visas that allow limited work can be tracked. Certainly, using the tax system is one way of doing that. Another key point that I would like to draw to hon. Members' attention, is that there remains no limit on the number of genuine international students who can come to the UK to study. We do not propose to cap or limit the number of overseas students who can come to study in the UK. As the Home Secretary recently announced, we will shortly be seeking views on study migration routes. I encourage all interested parties, which I am sure will include many institutions in the constituencies of hon. Members here today, to participate and ensure that every point of view is heard.

**Paul Blomfield:** The Minister is talking about the consultation and the Home Secretary's statement and, in his earlier remarks, he talked about quality. Will he confirm or deny that the Home Office intends to use the teaching excellence framework as a measure for quality in relation to the visa regime?

**Mr Goodwill:** I think that the hon. Gentleman will understand from his time here that when one is in consultation, one listens to views and then comes to a conclusion. At this stage we are listening to points, including the ones that he has made. Indeed, one of the points that he made during his contribution was regarding the number of Indian students coming to the UK, and how we are going to prioritise recovering the number of Indian students entering the UK to study. May I point out that we issue more tier 4 visas to students from India than from any other country except China and the United States? The then Immigration Minister visited India in February 2016, and the Prime Minister herself has just returned, to ensure the message is clear that we welcome Indian students to our world-class institutions.

We have seen increases in the number of study visas granted elsewhere; China has gone up by 9% and Indonesia by 14% in the year ending March 2016, which shows that our immigration system allows for growth. The proportion of Indian students coming to study in the UK at a university increased from around 50% in 2010 to around 90% in 2015. This trend of smaller volumes of students with greater concentrations in higher education is likely to reflect the recent policy changes to clamp down on immigration abuse by non-genuine students and bogus colleges. In 2015, around 90% of Indian students who applied for a tier 4 visa were issued one; that is up from 86% in 2014, and 83% the year before

[Mr Goodwill]

that. The Indian student grant rate is higher than in our competitor countries. Indeed, the hon. Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan) asked about the time it may take for visas to be processed, and I confirm that 99% of Indian tier 4 students received a decision within the 15-day target.

**Paul Blomfield:** I apologise for pressing the Minister on this point, but it is important. Next week will be the last time that this House considers the Higher Education and Research Bill, of which the teaching excellence framework is a central proposal. Can he simply deny or confirm that the Home Office intends to use the teaching excellence framework as a measure for quality in relation to the visa regime?

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Gentleman is very tenacious, but I will repeat the point that I have already made. We are in the process of a consultation, are listening to views, including those made during this debate, and will come to a settled view in due course.

Including students in the net migration statistics is a point that has been made repeatedly during the debate. The Office for National Statistics, which is the UK's independent statistical authority, has today published a report that states:

"The net migration figures are used by ONS to calculate the size of the UK population in any given year and they include international students since they contribute to population growth. These population figures are used by national and local government to inform their planning and removing any key group would have consequences for this."

This has been a very spirited debate. I conclude both by thanking all hon. Members for their contributions, and by reiterating that genuine students will continue to be welcomed to the United Kingdom. This country is fortunate to have world-class educational institutions with formidable reputations, and this Government will continue to help them to ensure that they can continue to bring in the best and brightest students from across the globe.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered immigration rules for international students.

## County Court Judgments

[SIR EDWARD LEIGH *in the Chair*]

4 pm

**Chris Evans** (Islwyn) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered reform of county court judgments.

I know there is about to be a vote in the main Chamber, Sir Edward, so this might be the shortest speech on record in Westminster Hall. Even if it is not, I imagine I will be interrupted at some point.

This debate comes as the culmination of 20 years of frustration. Before I came to the House, I worked in the banking sector, in particular the personal banking sector. I was totally frustrated that people who had bank accounts and were very good customers of Lloyds Bank found themselves in all sorts of trouble because they had what I like to call "rogue" county court judgments against their name. Very often those judgments were born not out of large debts, but out of getting into a dispute with a mobile phone company or, worse still, a gymnasium of some type.

That is the problem with county court judgments: we imagine they are used for large debts when debtors simply refuse to repay their creditors. It makes sense that this mechanism for debt recovery must exist as a last resort. Without CCJs, it would be very difficult if not impossible for creditors to be repaid. However, there is evidence that CCJs are not being used in the correct manner by all sorts of companies. In some cases, they are used to demand payment of small debts, disproportionately affecting those subject to them.

A county court judgment is not something anyone wants on their credit record. Once a court makes a judgment against someone accused of having a debt, the record will remain linked to that person for six years on the register of judgments, orders and fines, whether or not the debt is paid off. The only exception to the rule is when the debt is paid off in under a month. There can be a devastating effect on a person's credit rating, cutting off access to all but the most unfavourable credit deals. A mortgage will become only a dream to someone with a CCJ against their name. That is why it is vital that the CCJ process is improved and, above all, reformed.

CCJs are the go-to option for many creditors, even before alternative means of resolving disputes have been explored or before attempts have been made to settle such disputes. They are simply not being used as a last resort. According to The Money Charity, 2,102 consumer county court judgments are issued every single day, with an average value of £2,030. [*Interruption.*] I think that is the bell.

4.3 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

4.25 pm

*On resuming—*

**Chris Evans:** Just before the bell rang, I was about to say that a recent investigation published by the *Daily Mail* found that 900,000 CCJs were issued last year, a greater than 33% increase on the previous three years. The investigation highlighted the particular case of ParkingEye, a company responsible for many private

carparks in this country and a significant user of CCJs to enforce fines. In the past three years, the company has made more than 60,000 county court claims against drivers, including one uncontested case in which it was awarded only 1p in compensation. Some of my constituents have written to me seeking advice after being threatened with CCJs and other heavy-handed tactics used by that company.

Duncan Bannatyne, writing in his book “Anyone Can Do It”, says that if a person does not honour their contract with his gymnasium, he will have no hesitation in taking them to county court. Again, I find that practice rather sharp. It is clear that civil court actions must have justice at their core, but can we really call it justice when a person has a CCJ on their record to a value of 1p? Such a CCJ could influence a lender’s decision on whether to give that person a mortgage or loan.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. I declare an interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on alternative lending. One issue that has been raised with me is credit scoring, on which getting a CCJ has a huge impact. CCJs are an outdated method. Does he agree that, combined with reform of CCJs, we should consider reforms to allow real-time credit scoring and encourage greater information sharing?

**Chris Evans:** Absolutely. As a member of that all-party parliamentary group, I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman’s chairmanship. He knows my interest in real-time credit scoring and that I think the situation is in desperate need of reform. I have always said that such reform would be a win-win situation: a win for the lenders because they would know to whom they were lending, and a win for the consumer because lenders would drive down their prices. I have been campaigning for real-time credit scoring since I came into Parliament, and I thank him for fully supporting the campaign, but that is for another day.

I recently had a lucky escape from a CCJ. In the past three years, I was involved in a minor collision outside my home here in London with a vehicle owned by the taxi firm Addison Lee. When Addison Lee got into dispute with the insurance company, rather than negotiating with the insurance company, it went over the top of it and tried to issue me with county court proceedings. Had I not received the documents in time, a county court judgment would have been registered against me, even though it was my belief that the insurance company was dealing with the claim. Luckily, I was fortunate enough to be able to act straightaway and seek legal advice, which prevented the CCJ, but people with similar cases have not been so fortunate.

My second key concern is that some people served with CCJs do not receive any notification if they have moved house. The only legal requirement for the service of court documents to an individual is merely a last known residence. There is no legal requirement per se for the court documents to be delivered or received. Indeed, court documents are considered validly served even if they are returned to the court marked undelivered. The result is that some people are unaware that there is a CCJ against their name until they apply for credit, such as when buying a car or a house.

The *Daily Mail* investigation raised the poignant case of a young couple from Northern Ireland who were told that they could not take out a mortgage on a new home because one of them parked for 20 minutes in a restricted airport carpark. The CCJ claim was sent to an old address, so the couple were completely unaware of it. Ultimately, the couple had to pay £200 to satisfy the CCJ and get the mortgage. I hardly think parking in the wrong parking bay is sufficient cause to turn someone down for a mortgage on a home. It is clearly important and in the interest of justice that those who are accused of owing money are given the best possible chance to defend themselves and respond to the claim. It is simply not acceptable that the courts are unable in some cases properly to inform those accused of owing a debt of the accusation and, more importantly, of their rights.

The third major concern about CCJs is the huge and often disproportionate effect that they have on people’s access to finance. CCJs are recorded for six years on the register of judgments, orders and fines if they are not paid within one month. Credit rating agencies make significant use of that register when deciding whether to give credit in the form of loans, mortgages and other finance. A person subject to a CCJ, by default or otherwise, has several options. If they can pay within one month, the debt will not appear on the register or harm their credit rating. If they can pay in full but not within one month, the CCJ will be listed for six years and be marked “satisfied”. Ignored CCJs can result in charging orders, attachment of earnings orders and warrants of execution that allow bailiffs to seize property to the value of the debt. There are processes for setting aside CCJs or making counter-claims if the claimant owes money.

Those who need access to credit but have a bad credit rating due to a CCJ against their name sometimes turn to credit repair companies in search of quick fixes. That is usually a mistake, because there are no quick fixes, as the director general of the Office of Fair Trading made clear:

“County court judgments cannot be removed from credit files unless they have been discharged (within a month) or were incorrectly granted.”

Sometimes the only credit available to those with CCJs offers extremely unfavourable terms to the borrower, such as high-interest payday loans. Those issues paint a very negative picture of the effectiveness of CCJs, and of how they are used in general, the way they are issued and the disproportionate way they affect people.

Reform is clearly needed. Although it is perfectly legal and within creditors’ rights to make claims against debtors for even the smallest of debts—it is correct that debts must be repaid—can the fact that so many people are taken to court over small debts be justified? There is a case for creating a new mechanism that creditors can use to seek redress for debts owed to them below a set value, similar to that in Scotland, with small claims for debts of less than £3,000, summary cause actions for debts of £3,000 to £5,000, and ordinary actions for debts of more than £5,000. That would allow credit rating agencies to draw a more accurate and reliable distinction between serious debts that may demonstrate genuine inability or unwillingness to repay loans and mortgages, and minor debts that do not.

More emphasis must be placed on mediation between companies and debtors in advance of CCJ claims being submitted. CCJs should be a last resort for creditors.

[Chris Evans]

Creditors should be able to demonstrate that they have made every possible effort to recover their debts amicably and by mutual agreement before heading to court. Those two measures, alongside other reforms, would help to reduce the rapidly increasing number of CCJs, which are issued daily.

The way that CCJs are issued must also be reformed. Those who face the threat of court action for debts must be given all the information they need to know their options. At this point, it would be remiss of me not to pay tribute to the important and useful advice provided by Citizens Advice on this matter. The first responsibility should be with the courts, which should make every effort to explain people's rights and options fully if they are threatened with a CCJ.

Without those improvements, we must consider the 14-day period in which a CCJ can be challenged to be too short. The vast majority of people served with a CCJ are not legal experts and must be given time to decide how to proceed. As it stands, the threat of high fees and fines, and the complicated nature of CCJs, can force people to submit and accept a judgment, even if they had the chance and legal right to oppose it. In my experience with Addison Lee, had I not sought legal advice and made a challenge, I would have lost out financially. I was able to take on Addison Lee only because the insurance company was willing to meet the costs of my challenge. It is important that everyone who faces the threat of a CCJ is given the best possible chance and the support they need to make a challenge, as I was.

Crucially, the courts must always be satisfied that the person who is threatened with a CCJ is aware of the process. It is not fair, right or in the interest of justice that someone can have a CCJ recorded against their name by default just because they did not receive any notification of it—it could even have been sent to the incorrect address. Without a requirement that the courts must be satisfied that the accused debtor is aware that a claim is being made against them and has received the court documents, cases such as those uncovered by the *Daily Mail* will continue to emerge.

Lessons can be learned from the Scottish system for delivering court summons. Documents are first sent by recorded delivery. If that fails, court documents are sent out with sheriff officers. Such a system would address the problem of unknown CCJs in the rest of the UK. Reform must be made to address the disproportionate impact that a CCJ can have on a person's ability to access finance. Credit rating agencies clearly make use of the register of judgments, orders and fines. Debts settled within one month are not placed on the register, but is that one-month limit arbitrary? All debts, once settled, should be removed from the register entirely once they have been cleared.

My suggestion of a new kind of CCJ for small debts might make a difference if credit rating agencies viewed them as less damaging. Of course, even a minor debt should be expected to harm a person's credit rating, but the size of the debt and the size of the loss of credit rating should be proportionate to one another. It seems madness that people can be turned down for financial products simply because they are in dispute with a mobile phone company or a car parking company. This debate is fundamentally about whether county court

judgments provide a sense of justice to creditors and to debtors. As it stands, they do not, as they appear to lean too heavily in favour of the claimants. Why else would their use by creditors be expanding so rapidly? That is a particular problem.

The Government are, I believe rightly, attempting to increase home ownership and access to finance, but the expansion of CCJs will surely hinder that effort. It is clear that some people with CCJs recorded against them are unaware of the fact until they get a nasty surprise when they check their credit rating. I am an Opposition MP, but I am happy to say that the Government have done good work in standing up to payday lenders and trying to increase access to finance by making sure banks access the right people. However, all that will be lost because of this abuse of the county court judgment system. As long as it is in play, that work will mean absolutely nothing.

Although it is not possible to know exactly how many people have CCJs made against them without their knowing or being able to provide a defence, the fact that the situation is possible is a problem in itself. For the people affected, having a CCJ on their record can mean the difference between being able and not able to own their own home. In some reported cases, it has even prevented access to finance for something as simple as a mobile phone contract. The Government have to introduce reforms to rebalance CCJs and allow debtors to defend themselves properly.

Debtors must have the best possible chance of understanding the legal action being taken against them. More effort should be made to resolve debt issues without heading to court, and if court action is the only available course a distinction must be made between high and low-value debts. Those subject to CCJs must be given more time and information so they have the best possible opportunity to make a challenge and defend themselves. The Government must also take action to mitigate the impact that CCJs can have on access to finance, which is already a problem for so many. I fear that if the Government do not reform CCJs and take action to address the issues I have raised, more people's lives will be ruined.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. I am not sure whether he is aware that the French philosopher Voltaire said, "We look to Scotland for all our ideas of civilisation." Although I will not say we need to go that far in respect of this matter, does the hon. Gentleman agree that when there is best practice, or better practice, in other nations on these islands, it is incumbent on the Government to look at that and learn from it?

**Chris Evans:** I did not think that Voltaire would be mentioned in a debate on county court judgments; I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on getting that quote in. In politics, we have to realise that if something works and works well, it does not matter if it is not our idea; if it is a good idea, it should be rolled out. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is here representing Scotland. He knows the system there, and it does work far better than the one we are discussing. It provides better justice for those who have CCJs against them and has a better system for ensuring that people receive the summons. That is something we should learn from.

I do not have much time, so I shall bring my remarks to a close. I welcome the Prime Minister's comments last month about the ongoing investigation of the use of CCJs and the disproportionate effect they can have on the lives of the many people who have been caught out by them. I wait in anticipation to see what reforms are initiated to protect people from the predatory use of CCJs. I know the Minister well: he is a fair man with a strong sense of justice. I hope that today he finds a way to right the wrong done to so many people.

4.41 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Dr Phillip Lee):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Islwyn (Chris Evans) on securing this debate. He has for many years had a strong interest in consumer finance, to which this debate is allied.

I recognise that concern has been expressed about the number of county court judgments that are made against individuals and businesses, the majority of which are entered without a defence being provided by the debtor. Last year, 745,235 county court judgments were entered in default of a defence. That figure represented 85% of the total number of county court judgments entered. I was concerned to read the reports in the *Daily Mail* that money claim forms have been sent to out-of-date addresses, despite the fact that the individuals and businesses concerned had updated all their records. The paper said that the knock-on effect was that those individuals and businesses had been unable to obtain credit.

Although many default judgments will be made because defendants simply do not have a defence to the claim, the Ministry of Justice is investigating the number of default judgments that were made because the defendant did not receive the claim, and the reasons why that occurred. We will then consider whether any steps should be taken to ensure that the system is not open to abuse. That will include working across Government and with the authorities responsible for regulating the businesses that use the county court to recover debts.

Seeking a county court judgment should be a creditor's last resort, when all other attempts to recover the debt have failed. Unfortunately, we know that debtors often fail to engage with creditors, for a variety of reasons. If the court system required debtors to acknowledge a claim, it would have serious repercussions for creditors, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, which would be unable to recover money that was owed to them.

Those who experience debt problems represent a broad spectrum of society, from people experiencing debt as a consequence of deprivation, poverty or other circumstances, through to those who have deliberately refused to pay for products and services used. Some of those facing court action are in difficult situations because they themselves are owed money that has not been repaid. In addition, the *Daily Mail's* investigation highlighted instances in which individuals had county court judgments entered against them without being made aware that they owed the money in the first place.

The current rules on county court judgments seek to strike a balance between the needs of claimants—many of whom are individuals, small businesses and public bodies—who must have recourse to an effective legal process to regain money owed, against the rights of defendants to be informed of a claim against them. The court rules

do not require the claimant to make sure or prove that a claim is received by the defendant. That would be very expensive for claimants and the system would be open to abuse by individuals and businesses that are seeking to avoid paying their debts. The court rules also do not require the court to verify that the defendant's address is correct.

More than 1.1 million county court money claims are issued each year. It would be impossible for Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service to process claims quickly if they had to verify address details in every case. The onus is on the parties to provide the correct information. Claimants must sign a statement of truth confirming that the details in their claim, including the address of the defendant, are true. Anyone who deliberately provides false information to the courts faces prosecution. Individuals and businesses must update creditors such as utility companies, and public authorities such as the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, about any change of address.

Safeguards exist to protect defendants. If somebody discovers that they have had a county court judgment issued against them but they do not owe the claimant money, they can apply to the court to have the judgment set aside. If they are successful, the CCJ will be removed from the register of judgments and the individual's credit rating should be restored.

I shall now respond specifically to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Islwyn. He asked about the disproportionate impact of CCJs on credit ratings and the difficulty of removing judgments from the register. As he said, the judgment will be removed from the register if it is paid in full within a month. If the judgment is paid after a month, the debtor can get the record marked as satisfied in the register. It will stay on the register for six years, but people will see that it has been paid.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the 1p judgments for parking that were mentioned in the *Daily Mail*. The documents were obtained by the newspaper under the Freedom of Information Act, and showed that those county court judgments were made. We have discovered that the figures provided were the result of data entry error. Default judgments have not been issued for nominal sums, such as a penny. A money claim cannot be issued for less than £25. On top of the amount owed, a claim may also include issue and a claimant's solicitor's costs.

On the concern that proof of service is not required, the rules were introduced following a consultation in 2006, and strike a balance between creditors and debtors. Before their introduction, there was great expense for both claimants and defendants in ensuring that claims were served.

On the question about action taken before the issuing of a claim, claimants are encouraged to contact defendants before taking action, which will always be the last resort. An existing protocol that encourages early engagement with a debtor is being revised, with the assistance of the credit and money advice sectors, to provide debtors with a further opportunity to engage with the claimant.

The vast majority of organisations responsible for bringing county court claims are large debt recovery agencies, utility companies or parking companies. It is important to balance the needs of businesses to recoup money owed to them with the need to give people a

[Dr Phillip Lee]

chance to defend themselves against money claims. The Ministry of Justice is working with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Department for Communities and Local Government to look at what more could be done to protect people from the potentially damaging effects of having a claim entered against them about which they knew nothing.

We hope that businesses will engage with the Government on what more can be done to ensure that claims are pursued only after the right checks have been carried out. The Ministry of Justice will continue to provide support and analysis on the court side of this issue, and will report back in due course. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the opportunity to discuss this subject.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## English Wine Industry

4.48 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Before I call Mr Parish to move the motion, I should say that no fewer than five Government Members have asked to speak. I am sure that Mr Parish will introduce the debate with his customary eloquence and brevity and allow his colleagues to get in.

**Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the English wine industry.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, and I am glad you have such confidence in me. I am very pleased to have been asked to be an English wine champion in Parliament by the United Kingdom Vineyard Association. I am also glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) is my counterpart for the Welsh wine industry.

Ever since Roman times, UK landowners, monks and noblemen have all tried to cultivate a domestic wine industry, but to little or no avail. During the Norman era, almost 1,000 years ago, the Domesday Book recorded vineyards in 42 separate locations. However, the colder and wetter weather of the middle ages soon put an end to that, and so our Norman conquerors continued this country's long tradition of importing wine. In fact, to this day we still import more of our wine from France—more than £900 million worth every year—than from any other country.

In 2008, when I was in the European Parliament and we were talking about the wine regime, I said in one great moment of bravado that we will actually produce more wine than the French. I rather fear that I may not live long enough to see that happen, but we do know that English wine production is going in the right direction.

**Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. We all see wine in the context of France—our nearest neighbour and obviously a major producer—but does he agree that British wine has a unique taste? It is naturally effervescent and has a delicate mineral presentation to the palette. It is an excellent product, worthy of international acclaim.

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend is so right, is he not? It is the best wine in the world; there is no doubt about that. I have never undersold anything in my life, and certainly not when it comes to English wine and Welsh wine—is there even a little Scottish wine somewhere? Hopefully not. Seriously though, it is great that we have this wine. I will come to this, but we have a very new wine industry, so we have the very latest equipment and the very best methods—and some great soil and some great grapes—so we have every chance to have good wine.

English wine is now the fastest growing agri-sector in the UK and last year alone it added £100 million to the UK economy. There are now more than 500 commercial vineyards in the UK, with as many as 5,000 people being employed across the sector. The acreage of planted vines has doubled in the last decade and by 2020 the UK wine industry is expected to produce about 10 million bottles a year, with 25% of English wine being exported, and that is a very conservative estimate.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): With those great figures, does my hon. Friend agree that one way to promote English wine would be to serve it in all our embassies around the world, and in Parliament and all our Government buildings? For example—to take one completely at random—Giffords Hall Rosé from Suffolk, or indeed Copdock Hall Rosé from Suffolk, would make a great addition to any of our fine embassies.

**Neil Parish:** Obviously there is great wine from Suffolk, as there is across all our counties of England and Wales, and it is right that we promote it in our embassies and in Parliament, in the restaurants and when we buy wine from Parliament, especially sparkling wine but also others.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend. I was made a snipe champion, so I rather think I have drawn the short straw, given that he was made a wine champion.

My hon. Friend makes an important point. Should we not put our wine together with all our other amazing produce, such as our cheese, our cream and our butter, to promote tourism in the UK, perhaps with the Great British Food Unit behind it, so that we sell our great food and drink much better—Staplecombe Vineyards produces some of that wine; it is in Taunton, so obviously it must be good—and really make it part of our sales pitch?

**Neil Parish:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is right, and we are conducting an inquiry at the moment into rural tourism, so this is very much about the food, the drink, the wine—everything is there. We can compete with our continental cousins extremely well. Let us go out and actually do it.

There are as many as 50 wineries and vineyards in Devon alone, with UK vineyards appearing as far north as Yorkshire. From growers in East Anglia reporting higher yields to Camel Valley Vineyard in Cornwall having a

“fourth good year in a row”,

the English wine industry is going from strength to strength.

Let me turn to the reasons for that growth. Many parts of England have always had the same chalky limestone soils as the Champagne region, but now English wine makers are catching up because our climate is improving. In blind tastings, some English wines are now beating the great Champagne houses at their own game. Therefore, with climate changing, we have every chance to produce the very best sparkling wines; dare I say—I will probably be sued—almost champagnes?

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Not only are we beating them in competition, but the French are now admitting, “If you can’t beat them, join them,” because the houses of Taittinger and Pommery have both bought acreage and joined up with English vineyards in the United Kingdom to produce English sparkling wine that is better than French champagne.

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend has obviously been looking at my speech, because I shall mention that in a minute. There is no doubt that they are buying up land. We have to be careful; we do not want to be entirely overrun by France, especially given the history. Seriously, though,

what the French are bringing is the investment and the expertise, so if we can work together, I believe that English wine, in particular sparkling wine, has huge potential.

There is some more good news. Statistics produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs show that an additional 75,000 acres of land are suitable for producing English sparkling wine. That is equivalent in size to the whole of the Champagne region, which just shows how much potential there is for growth.

Only last year, the champagne producer Taittinger purchased some land in Kent to establish its first UK vineyard. Prime vineyard land in the UK is actually much cheaper than in France and many of our arable farmers are also beginning to see that attraction. Vineyards are quickly becoming part of farm diversification, and with the added bonus of shops, cafés, tours, weddings and wine tastings, vineyards and wineries can provide a much needed boost for agri-tourism and rural jobs.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Further to that point, will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating Sharpham Wine and Cheese, which does just that? It is not only producing fantastic wines but fantastic cheeses and is providing a welcome tourist centre for tours, sharing expertise and creating valuable local employment.

**Neil Parish:** I very much commend the Sharpham vineyard, because, once again, it is reaching out. It is producing a good wine, and then we can have good local food and bring more and more tourists down to the south-west, provided that we dual the A30 into Honiton while we are it and along the A358 to Taunton—that was not part of my speech.

English wine is now of such a good standard that our Government and embassies are confident of promoting English sparkling wine across the world—I am sure we will hear much more about that from the Minister. I even heard on the grapevine—sorry about that—earlier this year that Chapel Down in Kent had become Downing Street’s official wine supplier. Unfortunately, however, less than 1% of wine drunk in the UK is from our shores, so for a start let us ensure that a variety of English and Welsh wines are sold in Parliament, Government buildings and our embassies, and are not just found in Downing Street.

Parliament’s bars and restaurants are selling French champagne and Italian prosecco, as well as wines from Chile to New Zealand. It is great to have these wines here, but we really must have our English wine here. Even worse, the House of Commons-branded wine is not actually from the UK. If we are going to promote English or Welsh wine globally, we really should get our own House in order first.

It is true that English wine is generally a little more expensive, so the Government must look at what can be done to create a level playing field. In the UK, as much as 60% of the cost of an average bottle of wine goes on tax—so I expect our great Minister here to reduce the tax on our wine immediately. That 60% in this country compares with about 21% in France. Excise duty is too high in this country and punishes domestic wine producers the most, who pay duty even before the wine is sold. At the last Budget in March, all other drink sectors received duty freezes, but the wine industry saw a duty rise. There is therefore a serious point to be made: our growers of

[Neil Parish]

wine and grapes should be treated fairly. If wine continues to go unnoticed and unprotected by Government, there will be a growing impact on the industry right across the board, from small to large producers.

It is also vital that the UK rejoins the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, the OIV, which is the global organisation for science and technical standards in the wine trade. The British Government left the organisation in 2005, citing cost, but all the big wine producers are members, including most of Europe. OIV members account for some 80% of global production. We need a seat at the top table to help to construct the rules covering this global trade. Will the Minister commit to the UK re-joining the OIV? In addition, the English wine industry reports that there are not enough approved pesticides. The green book of UK-approved pesticides gets thinner every year. Any assistance or reassurance that the Minister can give us and the industry that the issue will be given close attention will be much appreciated. We need a level playing field with our European counterparts.

I want English wine to be a big Brexit success story. The Government are committed to boosting British exports to growing markets around the world. Where better to start than English wine, where many of the top export markets are in Asia? When negotiating a new trade deal with the EU, the Government should look to secure tariff-free access for wine produced in the UK. That should also be a priority for trade deals with other nations. We also need a national scheme equivalent to the EU's protected geographical status. We must protect our names and the particular association of English sparkling wines as being a high-quality product. The protected geographical indications currently cover British products such as west country lamb and Exmoor Jersey blue cheese. I was pleased therefore to hear that the Government were considering registering the name "Sussex" as a kitemark brand for sparkling wine. What progress has been made on that registration? Where does Brexit leave the opportunity to have protected regional brands? We also need to focus on training and skills. Vineyards must get the necessary labour post-Brexit to realise their full potential.

Finally, if we allow our producers equal competition against subsidised wine industries in other countries, we will definitely need a new farming support regime. We must help and encourage those who produce and export the very best English wine. Minister, there are a lot of them. There is so much more we can do to encourage this growing industry, whether through promotion, name recognition or making tax changes to help exports. English wine can be an even better success, so let us uncork its great potential.

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** We have five Members wishing to speak. I want to get everyone in. I will start with Nick Herbert, but I want every speech to be a brief sip and not a long swill, please.

5.2 pm

**Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward, in this important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing it. I am particularly pleased to

be speaking in it because my constituency, which I am proud to represent, has more wine producers than any other. We have 17 producers that I am aware of, including award-winning producers such as: Stopham, whose wine was served on the Queen's barge in the diamond jubilee celebrations; Wiston; Nutbourne; and, perhaps most notably—arguably it is the finest English wine—Nyetimber, which is a premium brand that is increasingly exported globally.

First, I want to add to what my hon. Friend said about the importance of the Government getting behind this industry in relatively easy ways. It seems to me absolutely obvious that the Government should showcase English wine at its major events. I am glad that Downing Street is serving English sparkling wine. I hope that the Foreign Office is also doing so at appropriate events, and I hope our embassies will be encouraged to do the same. I recognise that English sparkling wine is relatively more expensive, but it says something about our country and this emerging industry if we can serve the wines. It would be a talking point.

I make a plea to the Minister to look at the normal procurement rules and to perhaps give a say and an opportunity to the variety of English sparkling wines that are produced. The Government should not just land on one or two, which I understand is the case in Downing Street at the moment. These are all emerging brands, and there are some particularly fine ones among them that win blind tastings. I understand that Clarence House adopts a slightly different approach in how it serves English wine. It has blind tastings and has arrived at serving rather more English wines as a consequence. The opportunity should be shared around more, and the Government should approach the issue in that way so that other areas of the country and other wines can benefit. Indeed, the Government may need to do that if they are to serve such wines more, which seems to me to be a relatively cheap way in which they could help the industry.

Secondly, I endorse what my hon. Friend said about wine duty. At the moment, wine duty applies across the board because we are in the European Union. It is not clear whether that would continue in the future, but there is a case anyway for reducing wine duty in the same way as has happened for beer duty. It has been shown that that has a beneficial impact, and wine has rather lost out in the argument in recent years. Wine duty was frozen at one point, but generally it has increased, and that has a negative effect that could be addressed. I hope that the Minister will join us in making representations to the Chancellor to support the industry by lowering wine duty.

Thirdly, I endorse what my hon. Friend may have said—I am not sure whether he did, but I will say it anyway—on the Government's producing a welcome roundtable. The then Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, now Lord Chancellor, held a roundtable on how English wine is promoted, bringing together the various interests in the country. It would be welcome if the Government continued with that initiative and held another roundtable. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that.

English wine is a potential success story. It is no longer a joke. People are talking about it. It is a potential source of alternative rural employment and a good, environmentally friendly land use. It seems to me far

better to grow vines than to grow ugly things on agricultural land that might have been farmed in other ways in the past. It is a great opportunity for the country. At a time when many of us may be utterly miserable due to global events, I can think of no better way to drown our sorrows than for those of us who drink—sadly, I am no longer one of them—to raise a glass of English wine and toast its success.

I do not hold with those who say that English wine should be a Brexit success story. Nor is it necessarily the case that tariff-free access for wine will be an answer in itself, because tariff-free access would imply a reciprocal arrangement and tariff-free access for wine that we import. As so often, the glib solutions are not necessarily the most straightforward. There are ways that the Government can get behind the industry, and I hope that they will, because it is an important and exciting one for this country.

5.8 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I will briefly break into this commercial break for English wine and produce to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate on an important success story. It is already a success story.

I declare an interest as the chairman of the all-party group on wine and spirits—it is an arduous task that I am delighted to carry on my shoulders—and as someone who spent his youth working at the English Wine Centre in Sussex in the 1980s. In those days, the English wine industry was not such a quality industry. Having been rejuvenated in the 1950s by the great pioneer of English wine, Guy Salisbury-Jones at his Hambledon vineyard, English wine in the 1980s was not an easy sell. We had to invent the “Great English Wine Run”, taking English wine bottles to Paris in a reverse of the Beaujolais wine race to try to promote that rather questionable project and product, but things have completely and utterly changed. English wine is now a quality product recognised as a premium brand around the world. It is part of the great British contribution to quality food and drink. We must not underestimate it.

If I could correct my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight), this is not British wine. British wine is a filthy product made of imported wine concentrates from abroad. It has nothing British about it. The correct terminology for what we are talking about is English and Welsh wine.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): And Scottish?

**Tim Loughton:** There are not yet any Scottish vineyards that I am aware of—but if climate change continues, the way that the new President of the United States may wish, we may be having Château Edinburgh before the decade is out.

The success story of English wine is huge. We are now producing some 5 million bottles of English wine per year and that will at least double by 2020, to 10 million bottles, with half a dozen vineyards each producing 1 million bottles of English sparkling wine, which is now three quarters of English wine production. That is a huge growth success story, and it is not just the wine production—there is also the cottage industry and tourism aspects to it, as my hon. Friend the Member for

Tiverton and Honiton said. Most of the vineyards are open to the public, have restaurants attached and have vineyard tours.

English wine is a quality product, so much so that it has now won no fewer than 175 awards in prestigious international wine competitions, constantly winning blind tastings, in particular up against some of the best French champagnes. I absolutely echo my hon. Friend's words that we need to have protective marks. The Sussex kitemark in my area would be great progress towards that.

Alas, I do not have any vineyards in my constituency, but my constituents certainly drink a lot of wine. Around me we have vineyards such as Ridgeview and Bolney, as well as Plumpton College, which now has the only wine department in the whole of the country, where a Frenchman is teaching English students how to produce wine. My favourite local vineyard, and one of the oldest in the country, is Breaky Bottom, which is marketed as probably the best bottom in the world. That vineyard now produces a very fine product.

The Government need to take account of some points. We need to encourage investment. Setting up a winery in the UK is an expensive business, much more expensive than on the continent where they have a better climate for it. There are no real tax advantages and there is a particular tax disincentive—because of their size, most vineyards will send their grapes somewhere else to be made into wine and so they are not counted as agricultural premises. The tax treatment of the English wine production chain needs to be looked at and restrictions on planting vineyards need to be relaxed.

Only 2,000 hectares of land are under wine production in this country; there are 35,000 in the champagne region in France alone. Up to now, under the EU, we have been restricted from planting new vineyards. Those restrictions have been relaxed until 2030 but technically we are allowed to plant only an additional 1% of vineyards a year—another good reason why we are coming out of Europe as early as possible. That was a very protectionist measure from the days of wine lakes on the continent. We certainly do not have any surplus wine in the UK because it is lapped up as soon as it is produced.

We need some help on planning. We also need some help on duty. This year, wine was the only alcoholic product to receive a duty rise. Duty on wine has gone up considerably over the last 10 years. The duty per average bottle of wine was £1.33 in 2007; it is now £2.08. English wine producers have to pay tax at the same rate as continental wine producers, who can produce it much more cheaply.

I agree with all my hon. Friends' comments, and we need to lead by example. Every embassy around the world should be serving, as the normal staple, English wine and sparkling wine. Many enlightened ambassadors do that already, and the Foreign Office should make the supply chain for that much easier. It is crazy that the House of Commons bar does not regularly serve an English wine. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton will support a campaign to get an English guest wine in the House of Commons bars on a regular basis, as already happens with British guest beers. We should be putting our money where our mouth is in this place and supporting a fantastic quality English and Welsh product that is going to be the envy

[Tim Loughton]

of the world. I am very proud to have been there in the early days, when it was actually not much cop—but it is now.

5.14 pm

**Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Sir Edward, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing today's debate.

We are here to discuss and highlight the merits of the English wine industry. I have two fantastic examples in my constituency of North Cornwall. I thank the Camel Valley vineyard near Bodmin and Trevibban Mill vineyard in St Issey near Padstow for sending me their feedback ahead of today's debate, to highlight the challenges for and successes of the industry.

Trevibban Mill started in 2008 on an organic farm and its first wines were produced in 2011. It opened its doors to the public in 2015 and now produces 20,000 bottles a year, including some excellent, award-winning wine. Its Black Ewe organic red recently won a silver medal in the International Wine Challenge.

Camel Valley, an internationally renowned vineyard on the banks of the River Camel, was established in 1989 and continues to produce some fabulous wine. In 2009, Sam Lindo from Camel Valley won the trophy and gold medal at the International Wine Challenge for the Camel Valley Bacchus, also winning the gold medal in the December World Wine Awards for his sparkling Cornwall Pinot Noir. Camel Valley finished second in the Sparkling Wine Championships, behind Bollinger, which is a fantastic achievement for a Cornish business. The vineyard produces around 120,000 bottles a year and has managed to tap into American markets, with its wine being exported to 14 US states.

I am delighted that so many amazing success stories are coming out of North Cornwall's food and drink sector and Camel Valley and Trevibban Mill are two excellent examples. The wine industry in the south-west is definitely the bowler hat to the food and drink sector.

Some concerns have been communicated to me by the vineyards and I would be grateful if the Minister addressed them. The first concern is the difference between British wine and English wine, a point also raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton). Will the Minister tell me why wineries can import concentrate from abroad and call it British wine and why vineyards in England that grow their own wine have to label their wine as English? Both vineyards said that the difference between British and English wine is not clearly explained to the public, which means that consumers will sometimes buy British wine under the assumption that the grapes are grown in Britain. British wine is also cheaper than English wine, so consumers will often opt for British wine rather than English without understanding the difference.

**Julian Knight:** On that point, the quality of British wine is often so poor in comparison with that of English wine that it damages the reputation of English wine almost by osmosis—as well as damaging your guts.

**Scott Mann:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Of course, the sector would welcome a cut to duty. A suggestion communicated to me is the possibility of a duty to fund promotion of the wine industry. If 1p per litre of wine duty could be diverted to the wine associations, they would have a huge boost to their ability to support and promote the wine industry in the future. That would also make the Treasury very happy, because it would mean increased revenue through sales.

I would also like to put forward the idea of a more staggered system along the lines of income tax, where wine producers do not pay any duty on their first 7,000 bottles—the cider industry already has a similar proposal on the table. That would be a huge help to some of our smaller wine producers, which struggle to expand and have very high overhead costs, which have already been mentioned.

Our wine industry in England is going from strength to strength. We should continue to support these fine businesses, as we have done today with this debate.

5.19 pm

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward.

I am proud to have one of the most northerly English vineyards in my constituency: the Holmfirth vineyard, which is on the outskirts of the town that used to host the long-running BBC TV series "Last of the Summer Wine". Last year it was the busiest and most visited vineyard in the north of England, with 37,778 visitors—an average of 103 per day—on vineyard tours with wine tasting. It employed 18 full-time staff, with up to six part-time summer staff at any one time. It has quality apprentices, highly trained and qualified staff, an on-site winery, a 40-seater restaurant, seven self-catering apartments and seven acres of vines—all of which help to promote the English wine industry. It plans not only to expand the Holmfirth site next year but to plant 30,000 vines at its new site at Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire. It makes wine out of Solaris, Regent and Rondo grapes; its white and rosé wines have both won awards. Like other vineyards mentioned by hon. Members today, its biggest problem is that wine duty and VAT are too high: the wine duty is around £2.70 per litre and VAT is at 20%. That makes its wine uncompetitive against wine shipped in by supermarkets.

Hon. Members have made some excellent points today. I will not go on any longer, but I emphasise that Holmfirth vineyard is the ultimate in farm diversification. It has gone from being a failing farm to a popular tourist attraction that brings in much-needed tourists and revenue into my part of West Yorkshire and is part of a vibrant and expanding English wine industry.

5.21 pm

**Craig Mackinlay** (South Thanet) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Edward. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this debate.

We may be the fifth largest economy in the world, but sadly we are only the sixth biggest wine-drinking country, so there is some making up to be done. Let me cite some figures that I have found on the English Wine Producers website: there are 502 vineyards over 4,500 acres throughout the UK and production is growing—it is now at 5 million bottles a year, but that is really just a drop in the vat,

because 1.6 billion bottles per year are consumed in the UK. The average size of our vineyards is just 10 acres—they are very small and very niche, which may prove to be a weakness rather than a strength. However, we are seeing stratospheric growth: in 1975 there were just 600 acres under vine, but we are now at 4,500 acres, and the figure has doubled in the last eight years alone.

As we have heard already, competitions repeatedly rate English sparkling wine as a world-class product. Despite what we have heard about vineyards in the north of the country, much of the production is around Kent and Sussex, which share the soil and chalk characteristics of the Champagne region. We have a long way to go to reach the production levels of France, but let us aim to get there.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions vineyards in the north. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), I represent a northern constituency—probably the most northerly English constituency that is represented in this Chamber today. I am happy to represent Ryedale Vineyards, which produced the fantastic Strickland Estate 2013—an award-winning vintage. I join other hon. Members in asking for a small producers scheme like the one we have seen in the beer industry, because that could turbo-charge the wine industry and accelerate the fantastic growth in wine production in England.

**Craig Mackinlay**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. There are a lot of tax proposals that could be introduced, such as small producers schemes, which would get a lot of small producers off the ground.

I want to mention the experience of Phillip and Sally Watts, who took over Barnsole vineyard, which is situated in the village of Ash, between Sandwich and Canterbury. They are new producers; they have invested heavily and are now producing a significant premium product. They produce just 10,000 bottles of still wine a year, both red and white—the industry has to recognise that still wine is a problem for UK producers generally. It is the sparkling wine market that is growing: production in Phillip and Sally's small vineyard is now up to 12,500 bottles per year and they hope to get to 20,000 in a year or two.

When I spoke to Phillip this afternoon, he highlighted the problem in competing with bigger producers. At the heart of that problem, as we have heard from many hon. Members, is the duty rate. The duty rate since 20 March this year—not including VAT, which is added to it—is £2.08 per 75 cl for still wine and a staggering £2.67 per 75 cl for sparkling wine. We have to recognise how much duty is lost to the Exchequer because of legal importation by consumers from the EU, as well as the illicit market, which I have been concentrating on lately for tobacco. Too often, after bonding their products and paying lower duty rates in EU countries, larger producers in the UK and the rest of the world are then selling to UK customers. For instance, the duty rate in France is just a few euro cents per bottle, and my understanding is that in Portugal and Spain there is no duty. Small producers cannot take advantage of that cross-border circular trade arrangement, which frankly I think we must recognise as daft. It is certainly to the detriment of our small niche producers.

In summary, English wine has a great future. It has the opportunity to enhance UK agriculture, away from the increasing threat of monoculture, of which we are

seeing far too much. It also has the opportunity to create employment and to bring business to rural areas, which often need that support, and we should salute those investing in it. I pay particular tribute to Phillip and Sally of Barnsole vineyard and I wish them well in the future.

5.26 pm

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. If I may be so bold, you are the occasional ray of light on your party's Benches among the madness. It is nice to have you in the Chair.

One of the delights of being a Scottish MP is getting to come down and have a debate about English wine. I must admit that I have enjoyed it. It has brought Members out in force. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—I want to call him the right hon. Member; he seems like a right hon. Member because of all his work on the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. He gave an excellent introduction.

The most important thing in a debate such as this is to voice constructive ideas about how the Government can help what could be a significant and important industry. The right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) made an excellent contribution and raised some interesting points about tariffs—I saw a few ears prick up at that point in his speech.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned Scottish wine. I googled Scottish wine, which I confess I have never tried, and found a headline that said:

“Scotland's first wine branded ‘undrinkable’ by critics”,

but that was in the *Telegraph*, so I would take it with a pinch of salt—the report, not the wine. He also mentioned the tourism perspective. I will go on to make a few comments about whisky and our experience with it, because I think there are lessons to be learned about taking an industry and making it global. We have found that tourism is a huge factor: as you build a brand and gain global recognition for it, you get as many, if not more, jobs through tourism as through production.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) raised an issue close to my heart: labelling. It is really important that consumers can buy with confidence. The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) mentioned farm diversification, which is another particularly important subject. The hon. Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) raised some interesting points about small producers. With industries that are starting to go mainstream but are still in their early days, it is important that small producers are given as much help as possible.

When I first heard that I would have to sum up in this debate, which I was delighted about, I had hoped to be able to talk about the football and sour grapes. However, given the way that went, I will move on swiftly. Instead, I will tell Members something they may not know: claret was once the national drink of Scotland. In 1295, in an effort to fight against English expansionism, we signed what is known as the Auld Alliance with their French friends and neighbours. As part of the deal, we got access to the finest wines of Bordeaux, and so some of the oldest vaults in the UK are in Leith in Edinburgh.

[Calum Kerr]

Another consequence, of which hon. Members may or may not be aware, was that while we consumed the finest wines of the continent, and down here people supped on beer and mead, we started to ship the barrels back to France. We put what was then the poor man's drink, whisky, into the barrels, and so discovered that ageing whisky changes its characteristics. We therefore developed the foundation of a global success story, which is Scotch whisky. So I thank England for indirectly helping Scotland to start on its whisky journey.

Food and drink in Scotland was worth £14 billion last year. It is the largest manufacturing sector in Scotland, employing 34,000 people, and whisky is the anchor and a huge part of that. We have been able to build on whisky and expand into other areas. Our advantage, of course, is that whisky is a product of the environment, of the water and the landscape that we live in, and it has a provenance of centuries. It has desirability.

I then considered English wine more carefully and looked at the challenges faced by that industry. One challenge is climate, which shapes the kind of grapes that can be grown, and that creates another challenge, because some of the grapes that are suited to the climate and soils of the region are in fact less desirable and less well known. That may change over time, with global warming—let us hope not—but it is a challenge. So the grape types are less fashionable or desirable, and climate is a problem, but there is also the scale of production. When I speak to the people at Villeneuve, the wine shop in Peebles that I frequent on occasion, they tell me that one of the challenges is not so much the quality, but the quantity. Anyone who wants to sell wine on a large scale needs to get the quantity up as well.

The big opportunity and success has been with sparkling wine. The three grapes that make a classic sparkling lend themselves well to the chalkier soils that we heard about and to the cooler climate. As hon. Members know, the key to sparkling is not to over-ripen the grapes, but to have a high acidity level. The climate therefore plays to advantage in that regard and so, with the chalky soil, England has a product that is winning awards, as has been said. The challenge now is for the Government to take that potential and to look at how to support and scale it.

Traditionally, the Government are reluctant to support individual industries, preferring nationwide schemes for business as a whole. There is, however, a strong case for taking something with so much potential, in particular in the current environment. The Scottish Government have led the way in many regards by taking food and drink as an entirety and looking at how to complement products. I have met food production companies with the Scotch whisky industry to look at how we can leverage the success of whisky into selling complementary products off the back of it. That is the kind of thing that we should look at.

Since 2007, the Scottish Government have collaborated extensively with the food and drink industry. The Overton report was commissioned and it produced more than 30 recommendations, which involved skills, innovation, supply chains and the whole support landscape, including the creation of a national food and drink campus in Scotland to host all the key industry and public sector bodies. That is the kind of thing we need to look at. To go off at

a complete tangent, Google chooses to continue putting jobs into London not only because of the people and the skills there, but because of the ecosystem that exists in London, the complementary businesses in place. We should consider the same best practice for food and drink.

One last point to echo is the importance of geographical indication, or GI status. A lot of our existing protections are through the European Union and EU trade deals. If we consider that 90% of Scotch whisky is sold outside the UK—I am sure the aspiration of the wine trade is to be as big—it is critical for us to have protection as we do global trade deals. We must ensure that when we have a quality product and have built a brand and a reputation, it must be able to be bought with confidence not only in the UK, but the world over.

5.34 pm

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Edward. I congratulate the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish)—my friend and, his new title, the wine champion—with whom I served on the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in the previous Parliament.

We started and continued the debate with some history lessons, which showed how important wine is in this country and worldwide. It is something to be enjoyed, as well as being an important industrial product. From the excellent speech made by the hon. Gentleman, I picked out the importance of skills and how we hone and grow them, as well as the tourism on top of the wine trade.

Many hon. Members spoke about this good news story and, indeed, it is nothing but a good news story: a growing industry that makes high-quality products for national and international markets, exporting to countries around the world, including those with their own wine production. We can be proud of our wine industry and of the fact that it has achieved international accolades, including those that show English wines to have a quality that can be enjoyed worldwide. We are fortunate, but the industry is growing because it is being developed by people with skills and talent. As has been emphasised in the debate, we need to foster that and to hone the skills. As was asked for in the symposium earlier this year, the Government need to support the increase in skills and the colleges that want to provide the opportunity for people to develop them.

Hitherto, I have had little knowledge of English wine, like many other people I know, but I can say to the right hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) that my only experience has been drinking Nyetimber. It was two or perhaps three glasses—it was so enjoyable that I cannot remember—but I had a very nice afternoon in the wine bar in Selfridges. That was an experience that I will always remember—I managed to get back down the stairs though, which is a good thing.

I was also ignorant of the difference between British wine and English wine, which was highlighted in particular by the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). That is clearly a particular issue for our wine producers, who rightly believe in the need for a clear distinction to be made between the quality of British wine, which is industrially fermented from imported grapes, and their

own home-grown, high-quality produce. That distinction must be made clear not only in this country, but abroad, where it can be equally confusing for wine drinkers. I hope that the Minister will discuss how that confusion can be cleared up, considering that the reputation of our home-grown produce and our home-grown wines depends on their excellence and quality.

According to the British Beer and Pub Association, wine accounts for a third of all alcohol consumption in the UK, with 12.8 million hectolitres of wine being consumed last year alone. As pointed out by the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, only 0.1% of that was produced in the UK. Although well-known retailers such as Waitrose and Marks & Spencer stock English wines, and the Co-op is beginning to do so, in my area in the north-east—in North Tyneside—I have not noticed any promotion of English wines in the aisles of the stores. That might be due to the fact that there are no vineyards north of Yorkshire, because one important factor in the retail world seems to be the sustainability of locally produced wine. It is a big hit with consumers when they know it is a local product.

With the hectarage of planted vines set to increase and production of wine due to double by 2020, I hope that we see a commensurate rise in wine sales in the domestic market. Members have referred to the round table event hosted earlier this year by the former Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss). That proved very positive, especially as she committed to helping the wine industry to meet its expansion and export goals via the Government's Great British Food unit and facilitating access to data on soil types, water resources and infrastructure networks to ensure sustainability. I expect the recently appointed Secretary of State to continue that commitment and go even further with some of the things that have been asked for today.

Good weather conditions have ensured good vintages in recent years, but there is little that the Government can do to ensure good weather in future years, although reference was made to what the American President-elect may do to influence that. However, the Government can help the industry in other ways, as many Members have stated. UKVA representatives and UK wine producers want the Government to commit to rejoining the International Organisation of Vine and Wine, which, as has already been stated, the Government left in—

**Sir Edward Leigh (in the Chair):** Order. Mrs Glindon, will you please leave time for the Minister? You have been going for six minutes.

**Mary Glindon:** Sorry, I will jump ahead. It is really important for the Government to rejoin the OIV, as Members have asked, and to promote the sale of wine in shops here, in embassies and in the House. In promoting English wines, will the Minister bear in mind everything that Members have asked for today?

5.41 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) on securing this popular debate. I studied commercial horticulture at college, and one thing I learned was how to spur-prune vines. I remember people

saying in the early '90s that English wine could become a great, world-beating industry. At that time, although we were starting to win awards and break through, that still felt a long way off and a little far-fetched, but in the past two decades English wine has been a fabulous success story. It has become one of the most entrepreneurial areas of our food and farming industry. As many Members have said, there are lots of fantastic niche products out there.

My hon. Friend said that he thought there were some 500 vineyards. I am reliably informed that there are now 640 registered vineyards and 133 wineries, which shows how fast the industry is growing. I thought at one point that we were going to hear them all listed. Many of them were, and it is clear that hon. Members have a lot of pride in the vineyards in their constituencies.

English wines have picked up around 28 awards, including one gold award at the 2016 International Wine Challenge and three silver awards at the Effervescents du Monde. In August, a container bound for the USA left Southampton with more than 5,000 bottles of English sparkling wine from key producers across the country, including Digby Fine English, Hush Heath Estate, Bolney Wine Estate and Camel Valley. That is the beginning of a great export business, which we hope will grow.

Earlier this year, the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Norfolk (Elizabeth Truss), held a round table event at which the industry committed to and said that it expected a tenfold increase in wine exports—an increase from 250,000 bottles to 2.5 million, or from £3.2 million to more than £30 million in value terms—by 2020. English producers also have an ambition to grow the area planted from 2,000 hectares to 3,000 hectares. This industry is growing in leaps and bounds.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton said, there was also discussion at that round table event about soils and how the weather in this country was improving. DEFRA committed at that event to make available 3D LIDAR data to help the industry pinpoint the best areas for production. That was announced in October 2015. We are also compiling data on soil moisture content. Following the event and at the industry's request, DEFRA appointed a single Government contact point for the industry to discuss funding matters, which several hon. Members raised.

We are working with the UK Vineyards Association in two key areas: simplifying and streamlining vineyard and production data collection with the Food Standards Agency, and providing a forum with the Health and Safety Executive to allow the sector to discuss concerns about pesticide availability, which was also raised by several hon. Members. Perhaps the most notable response at that event was the industry's confident commitment to a tenfold increase in exports and a dramatic increase in hectares grown.

The sector's growth and the outstanding quality of our wines have not gone unnoticed by the international wine production community. Earlier this year, I was given the honour of opening the International Cool Climate Wine Symposium in Brighton. That was the first time that the UK had been chosen to host that major international event, and only the second time that it had been hosted by an EU country. I am pleased to say it was an outstanding success, attracting more than 30 international speakers and experts from some of the

[George Eustice]

most innovative and forward-thinking wine producing regions, and more than 500 visitors from across the globe, all wanting to learn and share their knowledge and experience.

The Government have played a big part in promoting our wines. A number of hon. Members asked what we are doing, and we are trying to ensure that all our embassies stock English wines. I take on board what my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) said about ensuring that we spread it around and do not choose just a single brand, but celebrate all the great brands that we have. Our Great British Food unit has designated 2016 the year of Great British food. While I was in Japan at the G7 Agriculture Ministers meeting earlier this year, I took the opportunity to promote our sparkling wines at the British embassy, and we have hosted similar events in the USA and Paris, and indeed at No. 10, to raise awareness of our excellent wines and top-quality British produce.

I want to move on to some other issues that hon. Members raised. Many hon. Members invited me to get involved in the issue of duty on wine. They will all know that that is a matter for the Chancellor. A number of hon. Members mentioned the idea of a small producers' scheme. I understand that if we were to do something similar to what pertains for beer and cider, there may be some state aid rules involved, but, given that many hon. Members raised that, I am sure Treasury officials will study the debate and look at some of the representations made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton also mentioned the International Organisation of Vine and Wine—the OIV. One of the issues with that is, under the duty of loyal co-operation, which was a requirement while being in the EU, even if the UK had been on the OIV it would have been required by EU law to do what the European Commission told it to do. That, for a number of years, meant that the benefits of rejoining were questionable. However, obviously as we leave the EU, regain our seat on many international forums and are able to speak freely again, that is something we will look at again.

A number of hon. Members mentioned protected food names. English and Welsh wines are protected. I believe that, as we leave the EU, third countries can continue to use protected food names, and this will be one area of all those we have to discuss where it will be relatively straightforward to roll forward some kind of

geographic recognition similar to what we have now. We are also exploring the possibility of using trademark regulations and the Intellectual Property Office to protect certain brands and certain specific recipes.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned Plumpton College. I commend the work it does in training, which is important. He also mentioned some of the restrictions on growing, which he put down to the EU. I am told that, actually, the EU restrictions on planting do not apply to the UK. I have to say that, like him, I was on the leave side and normally I would not pass up the opportunity to blame the EU for things, but, in the spirit of all being nice to one another in future, I feel I should point out that those restrictions do not apply here.

Finally, a number of hon. Members mentioned the issue with British wine, including my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann). The practice of introducing vines dates back to Roman times—right back to the beginning—but, as well as a provision in EU law for British wine to be recognised with imported grapes, there are also horizontal regulations in UK law that require it to be clearly labelled for what it is and for the ingredients to be labelled. I am however conscious that there has been increasing conflict and pressure given the advent of English wine and Welsh wine and, as we leave the EU, there may be opportunities to introduce clarity there.

We have had a fantastic debate in which we have covered many different issues. I am out of time, but I hope that I picked up many of the issues raised by hon. Members.

5.50 pm

**Neil Parish:** I thank all hon. Members, the shadow Minister and the Minister for their contributions. This is a very good news story. We have some of the best sparkling wines in the world and we can produce good white and red wine. Like I said at the beginning, I look forward to us, in a few years' time, producing more than France. Hon. Members and the Government can help by making sure that our wines are in our embassies and here in the House of Commons and promoting them wherever possible.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the English wine industry.

5.51 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Wednesday 16 November 2016

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### EU-US Umbrella Agreement: Scrutiny Override

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):** The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) is responsible for the Government's participation in European negotiations on the EU-US Umbrella Agreement which is a comprehensive data protection framework for criminal law enforcement co-operation. Due to rapid decision making at EU level the explanatory memorandum on the EU-US Umbrella Agreement, submitted for scrutiny to Parliament, was submitted late on 23 May 2016. Decisions on the signature text of the Umbrella Agreement were made by the Council of Ministers before Parliament could complete the process of scrutiny on the agreement. The proposals were:

Proposal for a Council decision on the signature, on behalf of the European Union, of an agreement between the United States of America and the European Union on the protection of personal information relating to the prevention, investigation, detection, and prosecution of criminal offences (8491/16).

Proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of an agreement between the United States of America and the European Union on the protection of personal information relating to the prevention, investigation, detection, and prosecution of criminal offences (8245/16).

The UK voted in favour of the signature part of the agreement at JHA Council on 20 May. This decision to vote in favour of the signature at Council and the delay in submitting the explanatory memorandum on the Umbrella Agreement resulted in a scrutiny override being triggered.

The reason for the delay in submitting the explanatory memorandum was due to negotiations of the Umbrella Agreement being brought forward at short notice, leaving member states with less time than usual to assess the text. I am very sorry that this shortened time scale did not allow normal scrutiny procedures to be followed and I hope that the House understands the reasons.

[HCWS262]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Ministerial Correction

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):** My speech on the Opposition motion on the conflict and humanitarian situation in Yemen on 26 October contained two inaccuracies which I wish to correct.

I stated that "President Hadi had formally requested military action to restore his Government, while the Arab League and the Gulf Co-operation Council had both called for "all means and measures to protect Yemen and deter Houthi aggression". I should have said that President Hadi had formally requested action,

as noted in UN Security Council 2216 (2015), "from the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf and the League of Arab States to immediately provide support, by all necessary means and measures, including military intervention, to protect Yemen and its people from the continuing aggression by the Houthis".

I also stated that "last month my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development hosted an event in New York that raised \$100 million for the people of Yemen, on top of the £100 million contributed by the people of this country." I should have said that in September my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development hosted an event in New York that raised \$100 million for the people of Yemen, which included an additional package from the UK of £37 million of support to Yemen, bringing the total humanitarian funding for the crisis this year to £100 million contributed by the people of this country.

[HCWS259]

## Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** My right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Baroness Anelay of St Johns), has made the following written ministerial statement:

On 1 and 2 November, I chaired the fifth meeting of the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council in London. The council was attended by elected leaders and representatives from Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St Helena, the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, Tristan da Cunha and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The key themes of discussion at this year's council were the implications of the UK leaving the European Union, international trade and building the economic development of the territories, anti-corruption and beneficial ownership, governance, human rights and child safeguarding, climate change, pensions and health. Ministerial colleagues from the Departments for International Development, Exiting the European Union, International Trade, Health, Work and Pensions, and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, as well as the Solicitor General, attended the discussions. The Minister for Europe and the Americas, my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan), met the Member of the Falklands Islands Legislative Assembly. Territory leaders also met the Foreign Secretary.

The council agreed a communiqué which identified priorities and set out a number of important commitments and areas for joint work in the year ahead. On the important issue of implications for the overseas territories of the UK's exit from the European Union, we agreed to take forward future engagement through a new framework, the UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council on European Negotiations (JMC-OT EN), to meet for the first time in the first quarter of 2017. Gibraltar will engage separately with the UK on EU exit issues given its different status under the EU treaties. We also agreed a shared ambition for a new UK-overseas territories economic partnership, in particular to take the priorities of the overseas territories into account as the UK looks to establish future trade and investment arrangements with the wider world and to explore the inclusion of the overseas territories in future UK bilateral investment treaties.

The communiqué reflects the commitment of the Governments of the overseas territories and the UK to continue to work in partnership to achieve the vision set out in the June 2012 White Paper: "The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability".

In line with our commitment in the White Paper, we will continue to report to Parliament on progress by Government Departments in implementing the commitments in the communiqué.

A copy of the communiqué has been published on the gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council-2016-communiqué>.

I have arranged for the communiqué to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS261]

### British Indian Ocean Territory

**The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan):** My right hon. Friend, the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Baroness Anelay of St Johns), has made the following written ministerial statement:

On 24 March 2016 the former Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge) informed the House that the Government would be carrying out further work on their review of resettlement policy in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). I would now like to inform Parliament of two decisions which have been made concerning the future of BIOT.

Parliament will be aware of the Government's review and consultation over the resettlement of the Chagossian people to BIOT. The manner in which the Chagossian community was removed from the Territory in the 1960s and 1970s, and the way they were treated, was wrong and we look back with deep regret. We have taken care in coming to our final decision on resettlement, noting the community's emotional ties to BIOT and their desire to go back to their former way of life.

This comprehensive programme of work included an independent feasibility study followed by a full public consultation in the UK, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

I am today announcing that the Government have decided against resettlement of the Chagossian people to the British Indian Ocean Territory on the grounds of feasibility, defence and security interests, and cost to the British taxpayer. In coming to this decision the Government have considered carefully the practicalities of setting up a small remote community on low-lying islands and the challenges that any community would face. These are significant, and include the challenge of effectively establishing modern public services, the limited healthcare and education that it would be possible to provide, and the lack of economic opportunities, particularly job prospects. The Government have also considered the interaction of any potential community with the US Naval Support Facility—a vital part of our defence relationship.

The Government will instead seek to support improvements to the livelihoods of Chagossians in the communities where they now live. I can today announce that we have agreed to fund a package of approximately £40 million over the next 10 years to achieve this goal. This money addresses the most pressing needs of the community by improving access to health and social care and to improved education and employment opportunities. Moreover, this fund will support a significantly expanded programme of visits to BIOT for native Chagossians. The Government will work closely with Chagossian communities in the UK and overseas to develop cost-effective programmes which will make the biggest improvement in the life chances of those Chagossians who need it most.

Parliament will also be aware that the agreements underpinning the UK/US defence facility will roll over automatically on 31 December if neither side breaks silence. In an increasingly dangerous world, the defence facility is used by us and our allies to combat some of the most

difficult problems of the 21st century including terrorism, international criminality, instability and piracy. I can today confirm that the UK continues to welcome the US presence, and that the agreements will continue as they stand until 30 December 2036.

[HCWS260]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### National DNA Database Ethics Group

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis):** I am pleased to announce today's publication of the eighth annual report of the National DNA Database Ethics Group. The group was established on 25 July 2007 to provide Ministers with independent ethical advice on the operation and practice of the National DNA Database.

I am grateful to the Ethics Group for their strategic advice concerning the use of biometric identifiers and for their continued oversight of the work of the National DNA Database Strategy Board which contributes to ensuring that robust procedures are in place to minimise DNA contamination and remove systematic errors in the forensic use of DNA.

The Ethics Group's annual report can be viewed on the website of the National DNA Database Ethics Group and I am arranging for a copy to be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS256]

### Surveillance Camera Commissioner

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis):** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying a copy of the 2015-16 annual report of the surveillance camera commissioner before the House, as required by section 35 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. The report has also been published on the commissioner's website.

The surveillance camera commissioner is an independent role appointed under section 34 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 to encourage compliance with the surveillance camera code of practice, review the operation of the code, and provide advice about the code—including changes to it or breaches of it.

The current commissioner is Tony Porter, whose was appointed on 10 March 2014.

[HCWS257]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Non-Jury Trial Provisions: Northern Ireland

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (James Brokenshire):** Today my Department is launching a public consultation on Northern Ireland non-jury trial provisions contained within the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007. Sections 1 to 9 of the 2007 Act provide for a system of non-jury trial, applicable in particular circumstances, in Northern Ireland. These are temporary provisions which may be extended by order for a period of two years. The non-jury trial system was last extended in July 2015 and will expire on

31 July 2017 unless the “effective period” during which the provisions are in force is extended by order for a further two years.

The provisions for non-jury trial under the 2007 Act allow the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland to certify that a trial on indictment is to be conducted without a jury in a specific case, provided a strict statutory test has been met. Today in Northern Ireland, there is a strong presumption for jury trials in all cases, with less than 2% of all Crown court cases per year held without a jury. However, the severe threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism and the presence of violent paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland continues to pose risks to the criminal justice system which can necessitate non-jury trials in a small number of cases.

This Government remain fully committed to seeing an end to non-jury trials in Northern Ireland, when safe and compatible with the interests of justice. There are no limits to the number of times non-jury trial provisions under the 2007 Act may be extended. However, the temporary nature of the provisions reflects the Government’s view that this is an exceptional system that ought to be reviewed on a regular basis and be kept in force for as short a time as necessary to uphold the effective administration of justice.

The public consultation being launched today on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and running for a period of 12 weeks will allow us to gather the widest possible set of views on the non-jury trial provisions in Northern Ireland. The responses will be used to inform my final decision on whether to seek to extend the provisions once again in Parliament next year.

[HCWS258]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Universal Credit

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** Across Great Britain we now have a solid foundation of universal credit delivery in every jobcentre and local authority. Over 400,000 claimants are receiving the new benefit and are being supported to build better futures for themselves.

Alongside this we are continuing our successful rollout of the universal credit full service for all new claimants. On 20 July 2016 I announced our rollout plans through to completion of the programme, including the jobcentres receiving the new service through to March 2017.

Today, I can announce the schedule for the remainder of the jobcentres through to completion of the rollout in September 2018. At this stage the vast majority of people will no longer be able to make a claim to income-based jobseeker’s allowance and employment and support allowance, income support, housing benefit or tax credits.

Details of the sites are in the table and they will be published later today on the [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) website.

Publication of these plans meets the Department’s commitment to give local authorities six months’ notice of implementation plans in their areas. The Department will make further announcements early in December on local authority funding for housing benefit support.

My Department will bring forward the relevant legislation for these sites in due course.

[HCWS255]





# ORAL ANSWERS

Wednesday 16 November 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b> .....	219	<b>PRIME MINISTER</b> .....	228
Africa (Economic Development).....	225	Employment and Support Allowance/Universal Credit.....	234
Education (Girls) .....	221	Engagements .....	228
Mosul.....	222	Engagements.....	235
Sahel/Northern Nigeria.....	219	Engagements.....	237
Third-party Aid Providers.....	224	Ministerial Meetings (First Minister).....	237
Topical Questions .....	226		

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Wednesday 16 November 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	9WS	<b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> .....	12WS
EU-US Umbrella Agreement: Scrutiny Override ...	9WS	National DNA Database Ethics Group .....	12WS
		Surveillance Camera Commissioner.....	12WS
<b>FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE</b> .....	9WS	<b>NORTHERN IRELAND</b> .....	12WS
British Indian Ocean Territory .....	11WS	Non-Jury Trial Provisions: Northern Ireland .....	12WS
Ministerial Correction .....	9WS	<b>WORK AND PENSIONS</b> .....	14WS
Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council .....	10WS	Universal Credit.....	14WS

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**not later than  
Wednesday 23 November 2016**

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## CONTENTS

Wednesday 16 November 2016

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 219] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for International Development*  
*Prime Minister*

**Calais Children and Immigration Act [Col. 241]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Robert Goodwill)*

**Commonwealth Development Programme [Col. 256]**

*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Clean Air [Col. 256]**

*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Feeding Products for Babies and Children (Advertising and Promotion) [Col. 257]**

*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Alison Thewliss)—agreed to*  
*Bill presented, and read the First time*

**Opposition Day [12th allotted day]**

**Autumn Statement Distributional Analysis, Universal Credit and ESA [Col. 261]**

*Motion—(John McDonnell)—on a Division, negatived*

*Amendment—(Damian Hinds)—agreed to*

*Motion, as amended, agreed to*

**Social Care [Col. 304]**

*Motion—(Barbara Keeley)—on a Division, negatived*

*Amendment—(Mr Jeremy Hunt)—agreed to*

*Motion, as amended, agreed to*

**Petition [Col. 355]**

**Prison Officer Safety [Col. 356]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Centenary of the Balfour Declaration [Col. 93WH]**

**East Anglian Fishing Fleet [Col. 117WH]**

**Immigration Rules (International Students) [Col. 126WH]**

**County Court Judgments [Col. 152WH]**

**English Wine Industry [Col. 160WH]**

*General Debates*

**Written Statements [Col. 9WS]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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