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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 8 December 2016**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 8 December 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

*The Attorney General was asked—*

#### Modern Slavery

1. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for modern slavery. [907734]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland)**: We have the strongest legal framework in the world, including the Modern Slavery Act 2015, which came into force in July last year. The Law Officers are supporting the Prime Minister's taskforce on modern slavery, and the Crown Prosecution Service continues to see a year-on-year increase in the numbers of prosecutions.

**Mr Speaker**: I think the hon. and learned Gentleman seeks to group Question 1 with Questions 6 and 8.

**The Solicitor General**: Forgive me, Mr Speaker. I make that application to group the questions in that order.

6. **James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for modern slavery. [907740]

8. **Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for modern slavery. [907742]

**Mr Speaker**: Good; and the hon. Gentleman may be learned, but if not, I am sure it is only a matter of time.

**Andrew Stephenson**: One of the main areas of modern slavery that we are uncovering in Lancashire is the trafficking and subsequent sexual exploitation of women. Often these victims will not come forward because they are being controlled through fear and violence. What more can my hon. and learned Friend do to support vulnerable women through the process?

**The Solicitor General**: My hon. Friend is right to raise that issue. The CPS has been instrumental in developing special measures to help people with vulnerabilities to give evidence, such as the pre-recording of cross-examination, ground rules hearings that are held ahead of the trial in order to avoid inappropriate questions, and evidence via remote link. All such measures help to increase confidence that support will be there for victims.

**Mr Speaker**: I call James Cleverly. Not here. I assume the hon. Gentleman was notified of the intended grouping. In that case, where on earth is the fella?

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): On the train.

**Mr Speaker**: No doubt.

**Seema Kennedy**: Can my hon. and learned Friend tell me a bit more about what the Crown Prosecution Service is doing to prosecute this type of offence in the north-west of England?

**The Solicitor General**: I note my hon. Friend's interest as a north-west MP, and I am happy to tell her that under the new modern slavery offence, eight charges were laid in the north-west region and eight offences in the Mersey-Cheshire region, plus other offences under older legislation, in the past year. Only last month three people were convicted of modern-day slavery and human trafficking in Liverpool and were sentenced to a total of seven years and three months' imprisonment.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Many of the prosecutions were the result of the European arrest warrant playing an important part. Will the Solicitor General, with the Home Office, ensure that the European arrest warrant remains a useful tool, whatever the outcome of Brexit negotiations?

**The Solicitor General**: The right hon. Gentleman is right to note the huge importance of the European arrest warrant in streamlining the process. That, together with other tools to encourage close co-operation not only between countries in the EU but more widely abroad, is a vital means by which we can deal with what is an international crime.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The Modern Slavery Act review published a few months ago noted that although it is national Crown Prosecution Service policy that all trafficking and exploitation cases be referred to the complex casework unit, in practice the policy is not always followed. What subsequent measures have been put in place to reduce the number of cases that could slip through the cracks in that way?

**The Solicitor General**: The hon. Lady is right to point out that important review, which I am glad to say is forming a key part of the Prime Minister's taskforce. At all levels, proper emphasis is being placed on the serious nature of this type of offending. Let us not forget that other types of offence that encompass such behaviour need to be dealt with as well, so the complex case unit has a key and increasingly important role in the prosecution of such crime.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): The Solicitor General is responsible for the prosecution of traffickers, not for the detection of them or for their sentencing. What are the main barriers to his securing successful prosecutions?

**The Solicitor General**: My hon. Friend is right to say that these are challenging offences. The problem is that very often the victims of this type of crime take a while to realise that they are in that position. When they come

forward, they want a consistent approach from the authorities that gives them support when they come to give evidence. That is the emphasis of the CPS and other agencies, and with that increasing support we are seeing those barriers increasingly being removed.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** It is very good to see the hon. Gentleman back in his place.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. The independent review commissioned by the Prime Minister that the Solicitor General has referred to expressed concern about the insufficient quality and quantity of intelligence at national, regional and international level, which it is said hampers our operational response. What steps does the Solicitor General think can be taken to ensure that our exit from the European Union does not further hamper our operational response?

**The Solicitor General:** May I first welcome the hon. Gentleman back to his place at what is a very challenging time for his family? We give him our very best wishes.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to talk about international working. He will be glad to know that the taskforce, in the form of the National Crime Agency and the other agencies, is placing heavy emphasis on the need to improve that intelligence gathering. When our exit from the EU happens, I firmly believe there will be mechanisms in place to ensure that that important work carries on unimpeded, whether by way of mutual legal assistance or some of the other mechanisms we have opted into, which will no doubt be an important part of the negotiation in the months ahead.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** I am very grateful to the Solicitor General for his kind words and good wishes to my family at this time.

The Solicitor General has set out that our membership of the European Union gives us access to a toolkit, including the European arrest warrant, which was mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), and which the Director of Public Prosecutions referred to as absolutely vital. However, there is also access to agencies such as Eurojust, where we have one of the busiest desks. What will the Solicitor General do to ensure that we quickly negotiate a new relationship with Eurojust, rather than ending up in Switzerland's position, where the negotiation took seven years?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Gentleman is right to emphasise other mechanisms. Eurojust and the European investigation order are other mechanisms that may be relevant. Clearly, they have to form a central part of any negotiation and be a priority for the negotiating team when it comes to the details. As he knows, the CPS is well aware of this issue and has been raising it, and the Law Officers will, of course, play their part in raising these important issues.

### Hate Crime

2. **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for hate crime. [907735]

**The Solicitor General (Robert Buckland):** We are committed to tackling hate crime in any form. Forgive me, Mr Speaker, may I apply for this question to be grouped with Questions 5 and 7? The numbering has changed.

5. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for hate crime. [907739]

7. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of prosecutions for hate crime. [907741]

**The Solicitor General:** As I was saying, Mr Speaker, the cross-Government hate crime action plan, published in July 2016, focuses on the reduction of hate crime, the increasing of reporting, and ensuring that all criminal justice partners deliver the appropriate outcomes for victims.

**Mr Speaker:** I realise that, as a distinguished lawyer, the hon. and learned Gentleman's speciality is words—preferably a large number of them—rather than numbers.

**David Rutley:** Like many others in the Chamber, I was very concerned about the spike in the number of racial and religiously aggravated offences after the referendum. Will my hon. and learned Friend please tell the House whether that trend has continued in recent months?

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. I think we were all concerned about the spike that clearly occurred after the referendum. The total number of racial and religiously aggravated offences reported in July this year was 41% higher than in the previous year, but I am happy to report that the number of such reported offences has now declined and is at similar levels to before the referendum.

**Sir David Amess:** Will my hon. and learned Friend look carefully at the law relating to abusive and offensive online posts? Often when I look at the remarks that are made, particularly when someone has died, I find it quite incredible that newspapers host them, and I think these cowards should have their names and addresses printed along with the offensive posts.

**The Solicitor General:** My hon. Friend raises a proper point of increasing concern. I assure him that anonymity—perceived or real—is not an escape route for perpetrators. The use of false online profiles and websites still means that people are traceable, and they can and will be pursued, just like the appalling individual who, only this week, was convicted of offences arising from a racist campaign against the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger).

**Henry Smith:** I am grateful for my hon. and learned Friend's answer. Can he say more specifically what the Government are doing to tackle hate crime against those with learning disabilities and autism?

**The Solicitor General:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising an issue that has been of consistent importance to me since my appointment to this office.

I am glad to note that there has been a rise of 44% in the number of prosecutions for disability hate crime generally in the last year. When it comes to learning disabilities and autism, I am a strong supporter of local advocacy groups, which will often be the first port of call when a complaint is made by people with an impairment. The evidence shows that where the police work with these groups, more people with a learning difficulty will come forward, and I want to see this good practice spread much further.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): But given that on the ground in north Wales the number of prosecutions generally is falling, how can we ensure that public perceptions are reflected in prosecuting policy so that more individuals who commit crime get taken to court and dealt with by magistrates, who tell me that their courts are empty?

**The Solicitor General:** I am following the position very carefully in all parts of England and Wales. The hon. Gentleman is right that there are some areas, such as his, where there has not been the rise in prosecutions that we have seen in others. We have to further encourage consistency. The training that has been rolled out in recent months to all the CPS areas needs to bed in. With that approach, I think we will see a rise across the board not just in the prosecution of these offences, but in the confidence of victims to come forward.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Does the Solicitor General agree that prosecution of hate crimes is helped when the victim is supported enough to give evidence, and that more training must be provided by the teams that deal with hate crime UK-wide to ensure that all possible support is afforded to victims and their families?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Gentleman knows from his experience in Northern Ireland that the Leonard Cheshire Disability organisation has an excellent scheme in place to support victims. This echoes the point that I made earlier about the need for such best practice to be spread to give better support.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure the Solicitor General would agree that regional variations in conviction rates for disability hate crime are unacceptable. Will he set out how such convictions will be dealt with, so that they will not depend on where a person lives?

**The Solicitor General:** The hon. Gentleman is right to reiterate the points that have been made. I assure him that the training that is being provided applies to all CPS regions; it is being done on a national basis. That means that in whatever part of the country it is, there should be the same awareness and understanding about the sensitivities that apply to disability hate crime, and of the need to stop looking at people with disabilities through the prism of credibility; rather, we need to look at the person beyond the disability, understanding that their voice has to be heard.

### Criminal Corporate Liability

3. **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): What the Government's policy is on prosecutions relating to criminal corporate liability. [907736]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** The offence of failing to prevent bribery under the Bribery Act 2010 is holding corporate offenders to account for criminal activity and has incentivised good governance within companies. A new offence of failing to prevent tax evasion is included in the Criminal Finances Bill, which is going through Parliament at the moment, and a call for evidence will be published shortly to explore the options for further reform.

**Nigel Mills:** I am grateful for my right hon. and learned Friend's answer; I know he has had a busy week. I am sure he is aware that there is real concern that our regime has made it much harder to prosecute senior directors of companies that have been involved in very serious wrongdoing. When he gets on to this consultation—perhaps he could say when that will be—will he look at other regimes such as that in the US, to see how they have performed better than we have?

**The Attorney General:** I hope it is no disrespect to my hon. Friend to confirm that he is not the most intimidating tribunal I have addressed this week. He is entirely right that we should look at examples abroad, as well as at domestic practice, to make sure that we are doing all we can to deal with corporate criminal offending. He is right, too, that we must address the issue of whether it is easier to prosecute those in charge of small companies than those in charge of large companies because of the complexity of the latter's management structures, because that cannot be right.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): During the passage of the Criminal Finances Bill, the Government have so far refused to extend corporate economic crime beyond tax evasion. Does the Attorney General agree that companies should only be criminally liable for failure to prevent tax evasion?

**The Attorney General:** The hon. Lady's question reflects precisely why we are asking for evidence on this subject. We will then conduct a consultation to see whether there is a case to extend the type of "failure to prevent" offences that she describes beyond bribery, where it currently exists, and tax evasion, where it will shortly exist, assuming that Parliament passes the Criminal Finances Bill. There is an argument to say that we should look at this, because, as I say, there are other types of offending where it would be sensible to consider whether a "failure to prevent" offence would be appropriate.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The late Professor Gary Slapper, the well-known commentator and columnist who sadly died at the weekend, was a considerable crusader for informing the law on corporate responsibility. It would be a tribute to his memory if we were to work on that.

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that we should also look at two other matters? The first is the so-called Magnitsky arrangements for freezing the assets of those involved in corruption. Secondly, in order to enforce that, we must maintain the operational independence of the Serious Fraud Office.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope that three points satisfy the hon. Gentleman's palette.

**The Attorney General:** I will attempt to remember them all, Mr Speaker. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is worth looking at his first point. There are many people who believe that there are gaps in the law, but it is also important to make sure that we take full account of concerns that will be expressed about the burdens placed on businesses of all kinds if we get that balance wrong.

On asset freezing and asset seizure, my hon. Friend is right to say that if we are going to successfully prosecute and convict those who are engaged in criminal activity, we must also make sure that we can recover assets where appropriate, so we will look at that in the course of the process in which we are engaged.

### Leaving the EU: Human Rights

4. **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on the protection of human rights in the UK. [907737]

**The Attorney General (Jeremy Wright):** The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of respect for human rights that long predates the European Union and that will continue following our withdrawal from it.

**Marion Fellows:** What existing human rights enjoyed by UK citizens under EU directives could not or should not be enshrined in UK law, if or when we leave the European Union?

**The Attorney General:** As I hope I made clear in my first answer, I do not believe that human rights protections in this country are dependent on EU law. We will certainly look, in the course of the great repeal Bill and other measures that this House will have to consider, at how we transfer those obligations currently under EU law into domestic law where the House believes that it is appropriate to do so. I maintain the view that we will continue to protect human rights in this country. Moreover, we will continue to be leading advocates for human rights around the world.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Is it still the Government's policy to introduce a separate Bill of Rights to enshrine things in British law?

**The Attorney General:** We remain of the view that human rights law requires reform. I think that my hon. Friend and I are in full agreement that, although we have no quarrel with the content of the European convention on human rights, it is the way in which that document is applied that gives us difficulty. The Government are certainly committed to seeking to do something about that. He will have noticed that we have a few other things on our plate at the moment; I think we will have to resolve those before we can resolve the matter to which he refers.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): What assurance can the Attorney General give that, once we exit the EU and become once again an emancipated, independent and liberated nation state on the stage of the world, we will maintain the proud heritage and tradition of defending individual rights in this United Kingdom?

**The Attorney General:** I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's confidence. We will certainly do that; we always have and we always will, and we will do it in all parts of the United Kingdom. As he knows, we will make sure that all parts of the United Kingdom are engaged in the process of exiting the European Union.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, when referring to our exit from the European Union, it is important to distinguish between that and the convention, and that the Government's policy continues to be that we should remain in the European convention and observe human rights as before?

**The Attorney General:** My hon. Friend is entirely right: those two things are distinct. It is our exit from the European Union that the public have confirmed in the referendum outcome and that we will now follow through. Of course, as I said earlier, our commitment to human rights will be maintained not just domestically but abroad.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

*The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—*

### Careers Advice: Girls

1. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve careers advice to girls and reduce the gender pay gap. [907756]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening):** Careers guidance should help all young people to get the inspiration and the advice and guidance that they need for success in working life. We want to see schools giving not only impartial careers advice and guidance, but high-quality guidance. That is why we are investing £90 million over this Parliament to improve careers provision for young people.

**Sir David Amess:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that good-quality careers advice is essential. Are there any further plans for the Government to remove barriers for women when they progress with their careers, particularly when they have young children?

**Justine Greening:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that. When we look in detail at the gender pay gap, we see that the situation for people who start a family often presents the biggest challenge that we face in reducing the gender pay gap further. We have given more than 20 million employees the right to request flexible working. We are providing shared parental leave, because childcare is not just an issue for women; it is an issue for men as well. My hon. Friend will know that we have committed to doubling the free childcare provided for working parents of three and four-year-olds from 15 to 30 hours a week.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Government commit today to publishing their response to the Women and Equalities Committee report on the gender pay gap before the House rises for the Christmas recess? The report was published in March this year.

**Justine Greening:** It is an important report, and we have taken time to consider it carefully. The hon. Lady will be aware that we laid gender pay gap regulations before the House in recent days, and we will be publishing that report very shortly.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** Are the Government as committed to eliminating the part-time gender pay gap as they are to eliminating the full-time gender pay gap?

**Justine Greening:** We want that to take place. The full-time gender pay gap has never been narrower than it is today, but it is important that we look beyond that and understand that people working part time have the same right to no gender pay gap.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Does the Secretary of State agree that although the gender pay gap has reduced, the fact that the pay gap for full-time workers is at a differential of 13.9% indicates that much work still needs to be done? Has she considered a penalty system for employers who do not comply?

**Justine Greening:** We try to work with employers on a voluntary basis. This is not just about forcing employers, although we have laid gender pay gap regulations on transparency before the House. It is about business understanding why they have an interest in fixing this issue in the first place. Yes, we are bringing in mandatory reporting, and we laid regulations on that before the House in the last few days, but we want business genuinely to grasp the nettle and understand why the issue matters so much.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** Female part-time workers enjoy 6% more pay than do their male equivalents. At a time when we are encouraging men to take more of their fair share of childcare responsibilities, is the Secretary of State as concerned as I am by the fact that the excellent Equal Pay Portal is worried that the gap is increasing over the long term?

**Justine Greening:** What is interesting is that we have seen people's work habits and routine change over recent years. We want to see no gender pay gap, irrespective of which gender is disadvantaged. Historically, this has been a significant issue for women, rather than men, but we want to see no gender pay gap, irrespective of gender.

### Rail Companies: Disabled Passengers

2. **Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that rail companies provide on-board visual and auditory displays for disabled passengers. [907757]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones):** The provision of an audio-visual passenger information system is mandatory for all new trains, and it has been since 1999. For older trains, operators have until 1 January 2020 to fit an AV passenger system. Currently, 70% of the fleet operated on the main line has been either built compliant or upgraded to be compliant, and the rest of the fleet will be upgraded or replaced by 2020.

**Maria Caulfield:** How can we encourage staff on our railways to make announcements on the trains to help visually impaired passengers when visual displays are either not fitted on the trains or, as is the case most of the time, not working?

**Andrew Jones:** My hon. Friend raises an important issue. It is a condition of an operator's passenger licence that it must publish a disabled persons protection policy. That covers how the needs of visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing people are met with regard to AV systems, including in times of delay or disruption. DPPP's have to be approved by the Office of Rail and Road. Additionally, disability awareness training is mandatory for all customer-facing staff and managers in train operating companies.

**Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP):** This week, the all-party parliamentary group for disability published an informative report on measures to close the disability employment gap. One of the issues raised by disabled people is the cutting of benefits, which reduces their independence and results in the removal of their Motability vehicles. When will the Government reverse this disabling policy?

**Andrew Jones:** The hon. Lady raises a very important question. I will have to look into this matter and reply to her in writing.

**Mr Speaker:** It is a very important question, but, unfortunately, it is somewhat different from the question on the Order Paper. That may explain the Minister's need to undertake some important research, the fruits of which I am sure we will witness in due course.

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** Having a disability-accessible train service is hugely important, but disabled people need to be able to get to the train station in the first place. What is the Minister doing to make sure that local authorities have a more consistent approach to making our built environment more disability-accessible, particularly in making sure that we have more consistency in shared space schemes?

**Andrew Jones:** Shared space schemes are a very controversial area, and their name does not help people. With shared space schemes, local authorities are trying to remove some of the visual clutter and improve the built environment, but that cannot be done at the expense of disabled people. In the Department, we have a work group that, with the Chartered Institute of Highways and Transportation, is looking at good practice in this area, and it will publish its report shortly.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Making audio-visual information on public transport mandatory for buses is overdue. Will the Government confirm that they will accept the amendment to the Bus Services Bill, which is going through the Lords?

**Andrew Jones:** The Government tabled an amendment in the Lords to introduce AV displays on buses. The Bill has finished its passage through the Lords, and I think it will be introduced in this House in the new year. We are very keen on the amendment, and we were very pleased to get it into the Bill.

### FTSE Companies

3. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to increase the number of women on boards and at senior executive levels of FTSE companies. [907758]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage)**: When companies have a senior team that better reflects the customers they serve, it is simply better for business and makes good business sense. Since 2010, we have more than doubled the number of women on boards in the FTSE 350. We have now committed to 33% of the members of the boards and executive committees of those companies being women by 2020.

**Oliver Colvile**: I welcome the work that Plymouth University in my constituency has done to ensure that there are more women on its governing body. As well as the work the Government are doing with FTSE companies, what steps is the Department taking to ensure that more women are on the governing bodies of universities across the country?

**Caroline Dinenage**: Plymouth is always a trailblazer—as we know, one of my hon. Friend’s predecessors was Nancy Astor—and Plymouth University is clearly no exception. I commend the work that the university is doing. Female leaders in universities and colleges are very powerful role models who are inspiring the next generation. We welcome the last WomenCount report on higher education, which showed that a third of governing bodies are now gender-balanced, and we support the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s aspirational target of 40% of women on governing bodies.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The fact that female representation on boards is rising is certainly welcome, but the number of female executive directors is still ridiculously low, accounting for less than 10% of the total number of directorships in the FTSE 100 and less than 6% of the total in the FTSE 250. How are the Government encouraging those companies to promote diversity within their executive pipelines?

**Caroline Dinenage**: The hon. Lady makes an absolutely excellent and very important point. We want more female executives on boards, which is why the Hampton-Alexander review requirement for work on the pipeline is so vital. It is also why the target of 33% female representation on executive committees and on the committees that report to them by 2020 is so important.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that successful women entrepreneurs—I am thinking of people such as Leah Totton, of “The Apprentice” fame, from Northern Ireland—are projected as role models, particularly for young females who aspire to follow in their footsteps?

**Caroline Dinenage**: It is absolutely vital that we celebrate successful female entrepreneurs. There are more female-led businesses in this country than ever before, but we know that if women were starting up businesses at the same rate as men, there would be 1 million more of them.

That is why it is absolutely vital that we celebrate those fantastic entrepreneurs—through the Careers and Enterprise Company, for example—as role models for the next generation.

### Sex and Relationships Education

4. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What plans the Government have to update their guidance to schools on the provision of sex and relationships education to include (a) LGBT relationships issues and (b) sexual harassment in schools. [907759]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening)**: The sex and relationships education guidance was issued in 2000. MPs from all parties, including those in the Chamber who have held my position during the past 16 years, know that this is a complex area and that we need a thoughtful and measured approach to updating the guidance. I made it very clear at the Education Committee that we are actively looking at the SRE guidance to ensure that all young people are supported in developing healthy and respectful relationships.

**Ruth Cadbury**: As the Secretary of State outlined, five Commons Select Committee Chairs, countless children’s charities, MPs across this House, experts and academics agree that good-quality statutory age-appropriate relationships education in schools will provide children with the knowledge and resilience they need to develop healthy and respectful relationships, and will ensure that they are less vulnerable to sexual harassment and violence. The Government have finally accepted that the current quality and accessibility of SRE are not good enough; will they amend the Children and Social Work Bill to introduce good-quality statutory SRE that applies to every school?

**Justine Greening**: We have already set out the fact that we are actively looking at the SRE guidance. It was first brought in 16 years ago, and we all recognise that the world that children are growing up in now is very different from that world. The hon. Lady’s question raises in particular LGBT relationship issues and sexual harassment. Those are important areas where we can do better. I am very proud of the Government’s record on LGBT issues and bringing forward same sex marriage, but it is an important area and is one that we are looking at.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): A young trans person in England is, sadly, three times more likely to have self-harmed and almost twice as likely to have attempted suicide as their peers. Does my right hon. Friend agree that more should be done to improve LGBT sex and relationship education in schools to support all students to understand better and be compassionate, to help reduce those shocking statistics and the often heartbreaking outcomes for those young people?

**Justine Greening**: My hon. Friend is right. No child should suffer the kind of discrimination and harassment she mentioned. In September we set out £2.8 million of funding over the next three years to focus in particular on tackling homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools. It is important that, alongside education, we are clear that we need to change attitudes as well.

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I appreciate the Secretary of State's answer on the SRE guidance. It is indeed almost 17 years out of date. At the last Women and Equalities questions she said she would "provide an update shortly"; now she is carefully "looking" at it. She is right that the guidance is completely out of date. It does not include anything on the internet or online grooming—it does not mention grooming full stop, let alone exploitative relationships. I wrote to her last month about this but she has not replied. Children in this country are waiting for a reply on when they will get proper sex and relationships guidance. Will she please answer now?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady wrote to me on 17 November. I will of course respond to her letter. In addition, we have been very clear that we want to see how we can make progress in this area. However, as many questions have underlined, it is very complex, with many different aspects that we need to work on very carefully to get right. Although I know that within this House there have been some excellent reports underlining some of the areas where the guidance should be updated, there is also a broader debate in the country about the right way to do that. This matter needs to be handled very sensitively. That is why we will make sure we take the time to get the process right and then set it out to MPs.

### State Pension Age

5. **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): If she will discuss with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions the provision of further transitional support to women affected by the increase in the state pension age. [907762]

11. **Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): If she will discuss with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions the provision of further transitional support to women affected by the increase in the state pension age. [907769]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes):** The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is fully aware of the issue, which we debated in this Chamber just last week. He has clearly stated that the introduction of further transitional arrangements cannot be justified given the imperative to focus public resources on helping those in most need. There are no plans to go beyond the £1.1 billion concession introduced when Parliament considered the changes.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck:** I thank the Minister for that response, disappointingly predictable as it was. Will she tell me whether anyone in Government has done an analysis of how much it would cost to implement transitional measures by comparison with what it will cost the Government reputationally and financially when the Women Against State Pension Inequality take them to court and win?

**Caroline Nokes:** Consistent is how I would prefer to describe my answer. The Government have looked into a variety of different proposals that have come forward in many forms, both from the WASPI campaign and from Opposition parties. As I have very clearly stated, we will not make any further transitional arrangements.

**Andy Slaughter:** The Minister must know that the lack of transitional support is causing real hardship to women in her constituency, as it is in mine. In the interests of transparency, will she publish any proposals that have come up since the Pensions Act 2011? Will she publish them and the Government's research, so we can see what they have done?

**Caroline Nokes:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, the welfare system provides a safety net for those experiencing hardship. We have made it very clear that we have already provided £1.1 billion in transitional concessions. The Government have published a great many figures on this subject. It is very difficult for the Government to publish further statistics on proposals that have come forward from both the WASPI campaign and Opposition parties when it is very unclear what provisions would be included around those transitional arrangements for women as well as men.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): With the effects of austerity being felt disproportionately by women, another Government policy affecting women is the 4% tax on child maintenance. Does the Minister accept that this places an additional tax on survivors of domestic violence, and will she ensure that that is addressed?

**Caroline Nokes:** I thank the hon. Lady for that question, although I am not sure how it relates to the WASPI campaign. As she will know, I answered questions on this very subject at the Select Committee yesterday. Interestingly, no mention was made of the charges to parents in the collect and pay system. We are determined to encourage as many families as possible to have family-based arrangements. Indeed, even in cases where there has been domestic violence, the child maintenance service can step in to make sure that bank details can be passed safely, including using bank accounts that do not have a geographic location—they have a centralised sort code—so that we protect women and have as few families as possible within the collect and pay arrangements.

### Scientific Professions: Women

6. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps she is taking to encourage more women to take up scientific professions. [907763]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** It is vital that we encourage talented women into scientific careers. Those working in science, technology, engineering and maths careers on average earn a pay premium of 19%. Ensuring that women work in STEM careers will also help to tackle the gender pay gap. Role models are absolutely crucial for young women, and some 40% of STEM ambassadors are women.

I would like to take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to Tim Peake, who did an amazing job of working with schools while he was on his space trip earlier this year. I have met many, many schoolchildren who have had their interest in STEM stimulated from the work he did while on his space trip.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** In a free market, the shortage of science teachers to inspire young women would be addressed by a rising wage. It is worth a try.

**Justine Greening:** We are trying to make sure that some of the very best graduates in STEM subjects go into teaching. Our bursary schemes help to encourage that. Some fantastic teachers are now coming into the profession, which will help us to further build the STEM pipeline.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Research from the Institution of Engineering and Technology shows that science, technology, engineering and maths-based toys are three times more likely to be targeted at boys than at girls. I should declare an interest as a chartered engineer in the IET. Will the Secretary of State declare her support for the Let Toys Be Toys campaign, which aims to give girls and boys, in the run-up to Christmas, a real choice about the kinds of toys they can enjoy and the careers they can have?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady is right to highlight this. There are no boys' careers and girls' careers anymore—these careers should be open to all children. A person's gender should not matter. As we have said, part of how we fix this challenge is by working in schools. I was very proud last month when one of my own schools, Ashcroft academy, won a STEM inspiration award for its Tuesday lunchtime STEM club. Such initiatives might seem small, but they have a profound effect on improving children's interest in taking STEM forward.

#### Employment Tribunal Fees

7. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of the introduction of employment tribunal fees on access to justice for women. [907765]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage):** The Government are undertaking a post-implementation review of the introduction of fees for employment tribunal proceedings. The review is considering, so far as possible, the impact fees have had on women and those with other protected characteristics, and the type of cases they bring. The Ministry of Justice will announce the conclusions of the review in due course.

**Justin Madders:** The Minister will surely be aware of the wealth of evidence submitted to the review that the number of tribunal claims has fallen by 80%. Only 1% of women discriminated against at work have brought a claim to tribunal. There is a whole raft of evidence suggesting that tribunal fees are denying women access to justice. Will she make representations to the Ministry of Justice?

**Caroline Dinenage:** There is no doubt that the number of tribunals has gone down, but in actual fact there is good news here, in the sense that people have been diverted from potentially acrimonious tribunal hearings and into mediation. ACAS has given people the opportunity to resolve their differences through conciliation, and that scheme was used by over 92,000 people last year.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): It is well documented that the Minister for Women and Equalities has been sitting on her Government's equality impact assessment since October 2015, and although I have made several requests to have sight of it and for it to be put in the public domain, I have been consistently told "in due

course". I am still waiting for an explanation of how long that means. Given that this week she published an equality analysis of further changes that the Government want to make to employment tribunals, will she now commit to publishing the document, announced and on her desk since 2015, before we break for Christmas?

**Caroline Dinenage:** The hon. Lady has made her point very clearly. I will speak to the MOJ, and we will get back to her as soon as possible.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [907745] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Justine Greening):** Last month, the Government welcomed the first report of the independent review by Sir Philip Hampton and Dame Helen Alexander of women in the executive pipeline, and we are pleased to welcome their recommendation that FTSE 100 companies should have at least 33% of their executive pipeline positions filled by women by 2020. In addition, this week the Government laid draft gender pay gap regulations that, if passed, will give unprecedented pay transparency to everyone working for a private or voluntary sector employer with 250 staff or more. That means the regulations will affect around 8,000 employers and over 11 million employees.

**Chris Elmore:** How can the Minister possibly believe that a budget reduction of 70% will enable the Equality and Human Rights Commission to fulfil its statutory functions, and why have the Government continued to refuse to complete a full equality impact assessment of the implications of the cuts for the work of the EHRC?

**Justine Greening:** The EHRC performs an important and valuable role, and its chair, David Isaac, and his board are well equipped for this task. The commission receives, and will continue to receive, sufficient funds to enable it to fulfil its full range of statutory duties.

T2. [907746] **Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Research from Guide Dogs has shown that 42% of surveyed assistance dog owners were refused carriage by a taxi driver in the past year, despite its being illegal. Ministers in the Department for Transport are showing great determination to address this wholly unacceptable discrimination, including through enforcement and education. What will the Minister's Department do to support these efforts?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities (Caroline Dinenage):** Assistance dogs are vital to the independence of many disabled people, and their continual refusal by a minority of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers is inexcusable. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), for his commitment to addressing this issue and eliminating this discrimination. My hon. Friend makes a profound case, and my Department will do all it can to support this important work.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): We have commissioned research revealing that as of the autumn statement 86% of net savings to the Treasury since 2010 through tax and benefit measures had come from women—an increase on the last autumn statement, when the figure was 81%. When will the Minister deem this issue serious enough to warrant action from the Treasury—when the figure reaches 88%, 90%, 100%? And when will she agree to listen to the EHRC and the UN, among others, and publish a cumulative gender impact analysis of the Government's policies?

**Justine Greening:** One of the best things we can do to help women financially is to make sure we have a strong economy, and that is precisely what we have done, hence the record employment levels for women, which are good news. The hon. Lady's question missed out our raising of the personal allowance, which has disproportionately helped lift women out of tax altogether.

T3. [907747] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): One of the changes to the state pension that everyone should welcome, but which is not as well known as it should be, is the recognition given to the years spent by women bringing up children, which now count as a national insurance credit towards a full state pension. Will my hon. Friend update the House on the number of women starting to benefit from this and its estimated value during a mother's retirement?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes):** By 2030, over 3 million women stand to gain on average £550 extra per year as a result of these changes. For women reaching state pension age in 2016-17, their median net income in retirement is estimated to be approximately £207,000. This is more on average than women have ever received.

T6. [907750] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): According to Age UK, there is clear evidence that older people with cancer are too often under-treated, owing to judgments made on the basis of their age rather than their overall health and fitness. Age discrimination in the NHS is illegal under the Equality Act 2010, so will the Minister tell us what discussions she has had with colleagues in the Department of Health about a plan to improve cancer survival rates for people of all ages?

**Caroline Nokes:** As the hon. Lady will know, the Department for Work and Pensions has recently published the work and health Green Paper, and we are looking at working very closely with the Department of Health on a whole range of issues to make sure that older people and our pensioners are treated fairly by all Government Departments and services.

T4. [907748] **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): A little earlier, my right hon. Friend stated that she did not wish to see a gender pay gap, so what steps are the Government taking to reduce it?

**Justine Greening:** Eliminating the gender pay gap remains an absolute priority for this Government. Transparency is one of the most important and powerful tools for shaping behaviour and driving change. That is why we will be requiring large employers to publish their gender pay gaps. Draft regulations were laid on

Tuesday 6 December, and if Parliament approves this legislation, which I hope will happen, the regulations will commence in April 2017.

T7. [907752] **Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): Does the Minister agree with the Resolution Foundation that cuts to the work allowances of universal credit undermining work incentives for disabled people? Should not those cuts be reversed now?

**Caroline Nokes:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, changes were announced in the autumn statement to the taper rate of universal credit. The reality of our changes to the welfare system is that universal credit is encouraging more people into work, and once they are in work, it is helping them, via our work coaches working in every single jobcentre, to make sure that they get more work and indeed better work.

T5. [907749] **Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): Research shows that nine out of 10 parents tell us that they want sex and relationship education in our schools to be compulsory. Do the Government agree with them?

**Justine Greening:** I very much welcome the report that my right hon. Friend's Select Committee published on this issue. That is precisely why we want to look actively at this issue. She will know from our recent meeting that I think it important to have SRE that works for the 21st century. It is indeed time to look at this, and I am very conscious of the House's overall view that this is a matter that we should now take on board. My right hon. Friend will know from her previous role as the Minister for Women and Equalities that it is a complex issue, but we are looking to see what we can do to address it.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): The United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has found that this Government's pursuit of an austerity agenda, resulting in cuts to benefits, meets the threshold for human rights violations of disabled people. What are the Government going to do to rectify that?

**Caroline Nokes:** The Government are committed to providing support for disabled people who need it, as reflected in the fact that spending to support disabled people and people with health conditions will be higher in real terms in every year to 2020 than it was in 2010. The core intention of the recommendations set out by the UN is already incorporated in UK policies, and our response sets that out in more detail.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): My right hon. Friend has committed to issuing by the end of the year a consultation document on the future of caste discrimination legislation. Will she update us on when that document will be released?

**Justine Greening:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question, and he is absolutely right that we intend to issue a full public consultation shortly on how best to provide the legal protection that we want to see against

caste discrimination. When we do that, I am sure that my hon. Friend and his community will want to participate fully in the consultation.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): It took the Government almost a year to come up with a very thin eight-page review on the care and management of transgender offenders. That referred to

“a number of events linked to transgender prisoners”

that attracted attention last year. Those so-called “events” were, in fact, the deaths in the space of a month of two transgender women held in men’s prisons. Will the Minister tell us why the Government failed to acknowledge those tragedies in their review, and why their proposals are so meagre?

**Caroline Dinenage**: I question all those statements. The response is not meagre; it is thorough. The Government are firmly committed to ensuring that transgender offenders are treated fairly, lawfully and decently, and that their rights are respected. A revised instruction drawing on the conclusions of the Ministry of Justice’s “Review of care and management of transgender offenders” was published on 9 November. It is already being applied, and will be implemented fully by 1 January.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): In the two months between 14 September and 15 November, the tax credits of 24,219 families were reinstated after being unfairly removed by Concentrix. What work have the Government done to assess the impact on women—particularly single mothers—who have been disproportionately affected?

**Justine Greening**: The hon. Lady has raised an important issue. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury decided not to renew the Concentrix contract precisely because of some of those challenges, and I will ensure that my hon. Friend contacts her with further details relating to her specific question.

## LEADER OF THE HOUSE

*The Leader of the House was asked—*

### **Barnett Consequentials: Estimates Process**

1. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What parliamentary mechanisms are available to hon. Members to scrutinise Barnett consequentials within the estimates process. [907753]

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis)**: Every Member has an opportunity to vote in the estimates process. The Liaison Committee is the body that has been chosen by the House to represent the interests of the House in selecting topics for debate on estimates days. If Members wish to examine a particular estimate in relation to the effect that it has on the block grant or for one of the devolved Administrations, they are free to make representations to the Committee, and are, in fact, encouraged to do so.

As Members know, the Procedure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the estimates process, to which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House recently gave evidence. We look forward to its report, and will examine its recommendations carefully.

**Alan Brown**: The simple fact is that the OECD has previously said that we have some of the worst levels of estimates scrutiny in the developed world. The EVEL process makes it even harder for Scottish Members to participate in decisions that can have Barnett consequentials, and we were promised that the estimates system would be reviewed for that reason. What changes will be introduced, and when?

**Michael Ellis**: I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman’s question. What with oral and written questions, Opposition day debates, Backbench Business day debates, business questions and Select Committees, there are doubtless more opportunities for Members to raise these issues today than there were when Mr Barnett invented Barnett consequentials in the late 1970s. Many avenues are available. As I have said, however, the Procedure Committee is looking into the matter in some detail, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to take part in that inquiry. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker**: It is good of the Leader of the House to drop into his own questions session. We are immensely grateful.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): The floods of 2013 were devastating in Somerset, and my constituency covered half the flooded area. The Somerset Rivers Authority was established to deal with flood resilience, and the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government gave assurances that the authority could be funded through a precept on our council tax bills. May I have an assurance that work on the framework for such an arrangement is under way?

**Mr Speaker**: Order. That is absolutely fascinating material, especially in Taunton Deane, but I question whether it has any particular relationship with the issue of Barnett consequentials. I am sure that that is a matter to which the hon. Lady will devote her grey cells in the hours that follow.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): A few seconds ago, the Deputy Leader of the House cited this question time as an appropriate mechanism for scrutiny of Barnett consequentials. Will he therefore tell us what the current Barnett consequential is for the health service in Scotland?

**Michael Ellis**: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, the blocks of sums that are allocated to the different Departments in Westminster have no bearing on what the Scottish Government can do in respect of the breakdown for the departmental heads. He is comparing chalk and cheese.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Will the Deputy Leader of the House tell us how many days are allocated to the Scottish National party for Opposition day debates, and will he encourage the SNP to devote its next debate to Barnett consequentials?

**Michael Ellis**: More than enough days are allocated to the Scottish National party, but I know that SNP Members have heard what my hon. Friend said.

### September 2017 Sittings

2. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What plans he has for sittings of the House in September 2017. [907754]

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis):** My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House announced recess dates up to, and even including, Whitsun at last Thursday's business questions. Further dates will be announced in due course, and in the usual way.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** The question was whether we will sit in September; assuming we will, where?

**Michael Ellis:** My right hon. Friend is not likely ever to be admonished by Mr Speaker for verbosity. As far as September 2017 is concerned, this House will be sitting here. I think my right hon. Friend is referring to the renovation and renewal of this place; that would not take place, if it is voted on in this House, until the early 2020s, so we would be sitting here in September 2017. But my right hon. Friend may wish to spend some time in the cellars of this place, because there one can gauge, if one has a tour, just how much work needs to be done in the renovation of this House, and I am afraid an extra couple of weeks in the summer recess won't cut it.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** If it is all the same with my hon. Friend, I would rather not.

**Mr Speaker:** We certainly do not want the right hon. Gentleman to go to the cellars and stay there until 2022; we would miss him greatly.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): On timetabling, can the Deputy Leader of the House say what progress has been made in government in securing a money resolution for the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, which was passed by a majority of 216 on Second Reading four weeks ago?

**Mr Speaker:** That has nothing to do with sitting in September 2017. The House is in a very curious mood today; questions are very interesting, but they suffer from the disadvantage of bearing little or absolutely no relation to the matter on the Order Paper. But the Deputy Leader of the House is a barrister, so if he cannot respond, nobody can.

**Michael Ellis:** The Government are making calculations on that matter.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): In relation to September sittings, I think the Deputy Leader of the House did not quite get the point my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) was making: if we are to have a renovation of this House that lasts a number of years, clearly not meeting in September means there are many months when work can be carried out uninterrupted. In that case, would it not be a good idea to move September sittings around the country, starting of course with Wellingborough, because the Deputy Leader of the House, who is the Member for Northampton North, would not have far to travel then? And perhaps we should take this a little further: maybe the idea should be to take them abroad, so those overseas can see how British democracy works, and may we start with Brussels?

**Michael Ellis:** It is always very tempting to spend time in Wellingborough, with or without my hon. Friend. The reality is that there have been decades of under-investment; there is a huge amount of work in utilities, including electrics, sewerage, telephones and every manner of utility and facility in this House. It is very far from clear that an extra couple of weeks, even were they to be allocated, in the summer would be sufficient time. But in any event, on the exact point my hon. Friend makes, the reality is there will be a debate on this matter and ample opportunity to discuss it.

### Topical Questions: Northern Ireland

3. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): If he will allocate time for topical questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. [907755]

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis):** As a consequence of devolution, the range of issues which are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Office is narrower than that of other Departments. The introduction of topical questions might lead to a situation where a number of the questions asked fall outside the range of the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. In May, the former Leader of the House wrote to the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee citing these as the reasons why we will not be introducing topical questions to oral questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

**Mr Robertson:** I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for that response, but would he not accept that especially with regard to Northern Ireland, although a number of issues are indeed devolved, there are very serious issues that are not devolved, and there have been occasions—some could argue yesterday even—when very important issues could do with being raised during Northern Ireland questions? So will he reconsider allowing just 10 minutes of topical questions? I am not really sure what harm that could do.

**Michael Ellis:** The concern has been that questions could be ruled out of order by the Chairman or that they might not be answered substantively, and that less time would be available for questions that had been balloted for in the usual way. This is simply an attempt by the House to ensure that the time is allocated as efficiently as possible.

**Mr Speaker:** I have no idea who this Chairman person is, but I will give the matter a bit of thought and see if I can work it out.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I have every sympathy with what the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson) is proposing, Mr Speaker, but you are always very kind and assiduous in ensuring that all right hon. and hon. Members from Northern Ireland get a chance to ask our questions. If we had topical questions, that would reduce those opportunities. Could we instead have more time for Northern Ireland questions?

**Michael Ellis:** There is pressure on the time in the House and we have a six-week cycle for questions to each Department. However, these matters are always carefully considered and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and I will certainly take on board the hon. Gentleman's comments.

## Business of the House

10.35 am

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Lidington)**: The business for next week will be as follows:

**MONDAY 12 DECEMBER**—Remaining stages of the Savings (Government Contributions) Bill followed by debate on a motion relating to the welfare cap.

**TUESDAY 13 DECEMBER**—Remaining stages of the Neighbourhood Planning Bill.

**WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER**—Opposition day (16th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “The disproportionate negative effect of the Government’s autumn statement and budgetary measures on women” followed by debate on homelessness. Both debates will arise on Opposition motions followed by a motion to approve a statutory instrument relating to counter-terrorism.

**THURSDAY 15 DECEMBER**—Debate on a motion on creation of a commercial financial dispute resolution platform followed by a general debate on broadband universal service obligation. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 16 DECEMBER**—Private Members’ Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 19 December will include:

**MONDAY 19 DECEMBER**—General debate on exiting the EU and science and research.

**TUESDAY 20 DECEMBER**—Debate on a Back-Bench business motion, subject to be confirmed by the Backbench Business Committee, followed by general debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

**Valerie Vaz**: I thank the Leader of the House for coming to the House today. He has had a very busy week. Margaret Thatcher said that everyone needed a Willie. She was referring to Willie Whitelaw, and the Leader of the House is rapidly becoming the Willie Whitelaw of this Government. He is there whenever anyone needs him.

The Leader of the House helpfully published the dates for Easter, May day and Whitsun under Standing Order No. 25 on Monday. May I press him for one more date? He failed to say when the House would rise for the summer recess. Some people are suggesting that it will be on 20 July, but we are not sure.

Yesterday the Government finally accepted that they needed a plan, a strategy and a framework. The Leader of the House said yesterday that the Opposition were “quarrelling like ‘Mutiny on the Bounty’ as re-shot by the ‘Carry On’ team.”—[*Official Report*, 7 December 2016; Vol. 618, c. 208.] I am sure that the British Film Institute is wondering where this genre falls! I should like to remind him that it was the intention of 40 Government MPs to support yesterday’s Opposition motion that resulted in the Prime Minister conceding—from Bahrain—the Labour motion. Where was the tarantula? The spider was missing, too. As ever, the message is confused. The Chancellor is saying that we are going to be out of Europe but that we will actually be in and paying for it. So we are out but we are in; it sounds like Government hokey cokey.

The situation is confusing for everyone, including our farmers. May we have a debate on the effects of exiting the EU that are causing concern to our farmers? In 2014, the UK exported £12.8 billion of products to the EU, which was approximately 73% of our total agri-food exports. May we have a response to the letter to the Prime Minister signed by 75 organisations asking for tariff-free access to the single market and a competent reliable workforce? Those organisations want protection for food safety, security and hygiene, and proper stewardship of our countryside, and they say that affordable food will be at risk if Ministers fail to deliver continued access to labour and the best possible single market access.

May we have a debate on the report on opportunity and integration? If this Government were serious about opportunity and integration in this country, they would reverse the £45 million cut in English for speakers of other languages, which affected 47 colleges and 16,000 learners. I know of a learner under ESOL who learned English, learned to drive and is now a driving instructor—oh, and she just happens to be a Muslim woman. Members around the House will be able to find similar examples of people taking opportunities as a result of ESOL. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the Government restore grants to local authorities, so that libraries, community facilities, the provision of skills training, and prevention work with families are not cut? Will he also ensure that they restore the migration impacts fund, which was set up by the former Prime Minister Gordon Brown and then cut by the coalition Government in 2010? It was included in the 2015 Conservative manifesto as the “controlling migration fund”. They can change the name, but they have not yet introduced it.

We must support our schools and ensure that the Equality and Human Rights Commission remains funded, independent and able to scrutinise the equality impact of policies and legislation. As we will celebrate Human Rights Day on 10 December, may we have a debate on protecting the Human Rights Act, which is an important piece of legislation? Some have argued that the UN declaration that became the European convention on human rights was just a moral code with no legal obligations, but the Human Rights Act gives it legal force. Every right that was incorporated in the Human Rights Act was systematically violated during the second world war.

Given that it is soon Human Rights Day, will the Leader of the House follow up on the Prime Minister’s response to the request from my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) to secure the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, a British national imprisoned in Iran? If the Foreign Secretary is too busy trying to learn who his counterparts are, perhaps we can ask the United States, which signed that agreement with Iran. We need the Human Rights Act to protect basic freedoms—every day, everywhere.

There have been two electrical overload near misses on the parliamentary estate and we still, through no fault of our own, cannot turn off the lights in Norman Shaw South. Will the Leader of the House update us on that?

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and the Speaker’s chaplain Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin both received awards this week. The whole parliamentary family acknowledges and congratulates them.

As for Her Majesty's Opposition, we will be carrying on regardless—[*Laughter.*] Wait for it. We will carry on regardless, trying to secure economic and social justice for all British people.

**Mr Lidington:** May I join in the congratulations to your chaplain on the recent award, Mr Speaker? I also I wish the shadow Leader of the House many happy returns for yesterday.

We will try to give the summer recess dates as soon as we can, but it is not usual for them to be announced at this stage in the parliamentary year. I looked into the situation regarding the lights in Norman Shaw South after the hon. Lady's question last week, and my understanding from the House authorities is that there was a serious fault in what is frankly an obsolete electrical circuit system. They had hoped to get the repairs done this week, but I will ask the relevant executive in the House service to write to the hon. Lady with the latest details. As for the other matter the hon. Lady raised, when she said "carry on regardless", she rather provided the description herself. I am sorely tempted to indicate the cast list that I have in mind, but I will eschew that particular temptation.

Turning to the hon. Lady's policy questions, what was striking about last night's vote was that for the first time the Opposition Front-Bench team and most, but not all, Labour Members accepted the Prime Minister's timetable to trigger article 50 by the end of March 2017. Given that the shadow Foreign Secretary had said as recently as September that we ought to go back to the people before taking a final decision to leave the EU, that possibly suggests a welcome change of heart on the part of the Opposition, and I hope that it is genuine and sustained.

The hon. Lady made points about the impact of leaving the EU on the food and farming sector, which is an important aspect of the forthcoming negotiation. That sector is a major employer and makes a major contribution to the UK's GDP. Many of its chief export markets are in other EU countries, so the Government are closely consulting the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association and other representative organisations—the Food and Drink Federation and so on—about the approach that will ensure that their interests are strongly represented in those negotiations. Clearly, the issue of labour will be a part of that, as will access to markets, but the Opposition have to acknowledge, as one or two in their ranks who have served in ministerial office have said publicly, that it is hard to see the vote on 23 June as one that would allow the continuation of free movement of labour as it currently exists. From my experience, of looking at opinion polls and of talking to people during the campaign, it seemed that that issue of migration was very much at the forefront of people's minds when they came to vote.

The hon. Lady alluded to the Casey report on integration, produced earlier this week. Louise Casey highlighted, in her direct style, some really important and deep-seated social challenges. I can trade statistics about money spent on teaching English as a second language, and I do not want to decry the importance of ensuring that people who arrive in this country learn English as a matter of priority, because without that someone cannot really play a full part in the mainstream of society. However, what I hope to see coming out of that report will be a conversation and a growing shared understanding,

across party political lines and around the country, of the fact that these problems are not capable of solution by an Act of Parliament, a ministerial speech or a tweak to a spending programme here and there. We are talking about problems of the self-segregation of communities that have deep cultural roots, and we have to work out locally and nationally how those should best be addressed.

The hon. Lady made a few points about other items of spending. I have to say to the Opposition that they cannot both attack the Government for not moving quickly enough to reduce the deficit and also criticise every action that is designed to obtain savings and pay that deficit down. We are having to take tough decisions now because of the failure of the housekeeping of Labour Ministers when they were in charge for 13 years.

Finally, we have a proud tradition of human rights in this country, but that existed and was strong long before the Human Rights Act. There was no magic to that piece of legislation, and this Government are committed to keeping human rights at the forefront of all our policies. I agree on the importance of the case of Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, and I hope that the Government in Iran will show mercy towards her and bear in mind the fact that her little daughter has been separated from her parents for so long. British Ministers and officials are doing everything they can on behalf of the family to try to bring this case to the outcome that we all wish to see.

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): The Royal Bank of Scotland has announced its latest round of NatWest bank branch closures, which will have a significant impact on my constituency, as well as on the constituencies of many colleagues across the country. Rochester, which is a key commercial town, will be left with only one bank in the centre. This has been a running theme across the country as we have seen the number of bank branches reduced by half in the past 25 years. Will the Government make time for a debate on the wider impact of these closures on the elderly, the disabled, and small businesses and retailers, which rely on these very important services?

**Mr Lidington:** I completely understand why my hon. Friend is speaking up so strongly on behalf of both domestic bank customers and businesses in her constituency. Of course what the banks will say is that more and more of us, both as individuals and businesses, are moving to online banking services, and that that therefore reduces the viability of the branch network. Ultimately, these are commercial decisions for the banks, but I hope that when bank directors and managers think about the impact of a proposed closure on a particular town, they will take carefully into account the impact on communities, particularly on people and those businesses that cannot simply go on online for the banking services that are so essential to their needs.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. It is good to see him back in his more familiar habitat of business questions after his exertions yesterday at PMQs. It was such a stellar performance that I and several of his hon. Friends are thinking about a DL for PM campaign—a sort of "Carry on Lidington" when it comes to PMQs.

[Pete Wishart]

It is another week and another instalment of Brexit cluelessness and chaos. Now we have it under the banner of a red, white and blue Brexit. After the Labour party meekly followed the Government's article 50 agenda yesterday, it will be the red, white and blue Brexit *v.* the tartan remain. Now that Labour has more or less caved in on the article 50 agenda, why does the Leader of the House not just bring forward a proper vote and end the circus in the Supreme Court? What is stopping him doing that now?

On that same theme, some remarkable things have been said in the Supreme Court, most notably from the Government's top legal officer in Scotland, Lord Keen, who told us that the Sewel convention was merely a political act and that this House can simply override the views of Scotland. I was in this House during the passage of the Scotland Act 2016, and I remember speaking on it at length—I also remember the Tories voting down every single amendment that we put forward. In particular, I recall that a motion that said that the Sewel convention would be in statute was passed by this House. We also agreed on the permanence of the Scottish Parliament. As massive disrespect has been shown to the views of Scotland, I would like to hear what the Government's views are on all this.

This week, the lords debated the size of the House of Lords. It was like watching be-ermined turkeys voting on the size of their Christmas pens. Now that the House of Lords has managed to secure a debate on the size of that unelected circus, when will we get the same opportunity?

**Mr Lidington:** I think that I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. I always think it is very dangerous when one is being prayed in aid by a senior Opposition spokesman in that way.

On the points that the hon. Gentleman makes about Europe, we must not forget that, even in Scotland, 40% of the population voted to leave. I can assure him that the Government will be looking for a Brexit that is, yes, red, white and blue, but that pattern includes the flag of St Andrew, and the saltire's interests will be very much in our minds throughout those negotiations. That is why—to take one example—we have just established a new Government Committee, along with the three devolved Administrations, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, to ensure that the three devolved Administrations have access regularly and at ministerial, not just official, level to those who are leading the negotiations on behalf of the entire United Kingdom, and that their interests are fully taken into account and understood.

The hon. Gentleman questioned me about the court case. Although I will not comment on ongoing judicial proceedings, I will simply say that the High Court judgment did raise important questions about the scope of prerogative powers and the relationship between the Executive and the legislature that we believe need to be decided through the appeal to the Supreme Court. The High Court decision required not just a resolution to be passed by this House or by both Houses of Parliament, but primary legislation. Clearly, as I have said before, we will have to await the Supreme Court's decision, but the ministerial code and the civil service code oblige the Government at all times to obey the rule of law.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for giving me two bites of the cherry, and apologies for standing at the wrong time earlier, which goes to show how confusing this place is. Thank you for being so generous.

The floods of 2013 were devastating in Somerset, and my constituency covers half the area affected. The Somerset Rivers Authority was established to deal with future flood resilience. The then Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the then Secretary of State for the Environment gave assurances that the authority would be funded by a precept on council tax bills. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that the legal framework for that is being established?

**Mr Speaker:** I think the hon. Lady is requesting a statement on the matter.

**Mr Lidington:** Anyone who remembers the TV coverage of those dreadful floods in Somerset will understand why that was such a searing experience for my hon. Friend's constituents and those of other hon. Friends representing the county. The Government have, of course, given additional funding to the local authorities directly affected so that they can make the necessary provision for future flood management. My hon. Friend calls for that sum effectively to be ring-fenced and handed over to the precepting powers of a new statutory rivers authority. The Government remain committed to the action promised by David Cameron when he was Prime Minister and we intend to legislate as soon as parliamentary time is available.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that on Monday and Tuesday this week the House rose somewhat earlier than scheduled, as Government business had come to an end. I know that the Leader of the House does not have a crystal ball, but I wonder whether we can work together to schedule reserve Backbench Business debates for such eventualities in the future. Members would accept, obviously, that if the Government business ran to time, those Backbench Business reserve matters would fall, but it would be useful to have reserve Backbench Business debates for such eventualities.

On a constituency matter, my constituent Jawad Dar came from Pakistan, where he had witnessed a double murder, for which the perpetrator was imprisoned in 2004. The murderer was released after six years and Mr Dar fled to this country in 2012 when other witnesses to the original crime were themselves murdered. By then the perpetrator had become the mayor of the region. Since 2012 Mr Dar has wrongfully been accused and convicted in absentia of crimes that he could not have committed because he was here in this country. The Home Office accepts all this as fact, yet has inexplicably determined to send Mr Dar back to face almost certain death in Pakistan. I implore the Leader of the House to urge Home Office Ministers to review this case urgently in the name of the British values of fairness, justice and mercy.

**Mr Lidington:** On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I am happy to have a discussion with him about that possibility, although as he acknowledged in the way that he framed the question, it is very difficult for

Government business managers to understand in advance how much time Members from different Opposition parties and, for that matter, from our own Back Benches are going to want to spend debating particular amendments on Report, how many Divisions they may seek, and so on.

On the constituency case, although I do not know the details I will ask the Home Secretary to take a close look at it, as the hon. Gentleman asks.

**Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): The proportion of secondary schools that are good or outstanding in the north-west has increased by 3%, by comparison with a national increase of 13%. Can we have a debate on what measures we can put in place to support northern white working-class boys and girls so that they can achieve their true potential?

**Mr Lidington:** I point my hon. Friend towards Education questions on 19 December. The point he makes echoes the argument made in a speech earlier this week by Sir Michael Wilshaw, who drew attention to the gap in achievement between northern and southern England and called for a much more resolute, determined exertion of leadership in schools, local authorities and other agencies in the north, to drive up standards. I am sure that my hon. Friend will do all he can to champion that effort.

**Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): After the past week, it would be hard to deny that the Secretary of State for Transport is doing anything other than making a huge partisan mess of managing our railways. Govia Thameslink also manages Great Northern and the Hertford loop, which affects many thousands of my constituents. This is the largest franchise let by the Department for Transport. If the Great Northern franchise is going to go the way of Southern, which increasingly looks to be the case, we will have a further, even greater disaster on our hands. Can we have an urgent debate in this Chamber on those train services, which affect people in the north and south of this capital city, and will the Secretary of State himself attend?

**Mr Lidington:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport did, of course, respond in person to an urgent question earlier this week on these matters. He has always felt that local authorities and MPs should have an appropriate say in local train services. I understand the point the right hon. Lady is making, but a lot of suburban commuter services also serve communities in the home counties, my own included. Placing the entire lead role in the hands of the Mayor of London and Transport for London would remove from my constituents and those elsewhere in the home counties any kind of democratic accountability for the management of their train services and the setting of budgetary priorities, so this is a more complex question than some of the critics of my right hon. Friend have been prepared to acknowledge.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): May I gently say to the Leader of the House that the work done by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), on the Somerset Rivers Authority is proving fruitful? However, the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton

Deane (Rebecca Pow), who is not in her place, was trying to make is that this is not just about Somerset—it is about the whole United Kingdom. We need to have another look at the whole way flooding is dealt with in this country; it is not synonymous with Somerset or any other part of the country. We do need to look at precepting, but we also need to have legislation, and I know that the Secretary of State is looking at it. Would it be possible to have a debate in this place to discuss the whole concept?

**Mr Lidington:** I cannot offer an immediate debate in Government time, although there may be opportunities for my hon. Friend to raise this issue—perhaps in the debate before the Christmas Adjournment. I can only repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow): the Government are committed to the changes she is seeking, and we will legislate as soon as parliamentary time allows.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): In January, the Secretary of State for Transport promised the then Mayor of London that Southeastern's rail services would transfer to Transport for London when the franchise came up for renewal. On Tuesday, he told the House that he had looked at Transport for London's business case and that it was not going to provide improvements for passengers in terms of capacity and extra trains, both of which points were incorrect. We now know that his true reason is that he wrote to the former Mayor of London in April stating that he had changed his mind because he would rather keep suburban rail services out of the clutches of a Labour Mayor. That is politically partisan and brings no benefit for my constituents, who suffered delays on that rail service yet again this morning. We need the Secretary of State back here in the House to account for the chaos on our rail services.

**Mr Lidington:** I completely understand why the hon. Gentleman, as a London Member, makes that case so vehemently, but, as I said a moment ago, there are interests to be borne in mind of communities outside Greater London who depend utterly on those same routes for their own journeys to work. The Department for Transport wants to work to jointly with TfL to get the best deal for passengers both inside and outside London.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): In recent days there has been further media coverage about the risk of fires in certain models of the Vauxhall Corsa. It is welcome that the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency is looking into this again, but may we have a statement from a Transport Minister on what the Department is doing to co-ordinate activities and reassure owners?

**Mr Lidington:** I will make sure that my hon. Friend's concerns are understood by the appropriate Minister at the Department for Transport and ask the Minister to write to him as soon as possible.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): When can we discuss the injuries suffered in sport? We will then have a chance to congratulate the Welsh Rugby Union and England's Rugby Football Union, which have reacted positively to the new medical knowledge of the deadly long-term effect of early Alzheimer's on those who

[Paul Flynn]

suffer repeated blows to the head. Could we also look to the suggestions made here last week that we need international action throughout the rugby world and the boxing world to recognise that practices that have been tolerated for a long time should no longer be permitted, so as to allow these sports to be made acceptable to younger generations?

**Mr Lidington:** It is right that it should be primarily for the sports' governing bodies to take the lead on this. I am sure that since they are so keen to recruit young men, and increasingly young women, to these sports, they want to be able to say confidently that the rules that they have in place do everything that can be done to protect the safety of competitors. I will ensure that Ministers at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport are aware of the hon. Gentleman's comments. DCMS questions, including to the sports Minister, are coming up on Thursday 15 December, so he may well have another bite at the cherry then.

**Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, the biggest social issue facing our country is that of dementia. Only too often, dementia carers do not have access to blue badges in order to help their charges. May we have a debate on this to ensure that carers can park much more easily?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight the importance of this issue. I am sure that he would want to join me in saluting the work of the Alzheimer's Society, in particular, and the creation of a network of more than 1 million dementia friends throughout the United Kingdom. The blue badge scheme already allows carers to use a blue badge when accompanying the badge holder, so the carer in those circumstances does not need a badge in his or her own right. It is then up to local authorities to decide whether to have an additional local permit parking scheme for carers on their own. Given the very different constraints on car park capacity and patterns of travel between one local authority and another, it is right that those decisions should be taken locally.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Now that the Leader of the House has had a bit of time to think about it, may we have a statement or a debate on jobcentre closures, with particular reference to the part of the Smith agreement that says that the UK Government and the Scottish Government should work together to "establish more formal mechanisms to govern the Jobcentre Plus network in Scotland"?

Perhaps in that debate the Government can explain to Glasgow's MPs and the Scottish Government why they had to read in the press that our jobcentres were going to be closed.

**Mr Lidington:** My understanding is that the existing pattern of provision in Glasgow means that it has significantly more small, separate jobcentres than other large Scottish cities. The Department for Work and Pensions is proposing—the consultation is now under way—to reduce the overall number so that services can be concentrated in locations that are still accessible to

everybody in the city and provide a better quality of service to people who need access to jobcentres in person. One of the reasons why fewer people have been using individual jobcentres in Glasgow is of course that unemployment in that city has been falling significantly. I wish that the hon. Gentleman would sometimes acknowledge that in his questions.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): At a recent surgery, two of my constituents described how members of their family had had their lives turned around for the better by the work of the Burton addiction centre in Staffordshire. Could we have a debate on the provision of drug and alcohol services in Staffordshire, which are set to be considerably reduced by reductions in spending next year, so that we can ensure that the experiences of my constituents will continue to be positive?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend is always assiduous in speaking up for the interests of his constituents in Stafford, but it is local authorities that are responsible for commissioning effective drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services, and those decisions are based on the authorities' understanding of local needs. Health questions on Tuesday 20 December may give my hon. Friend the opportunity to raise his concerns directly with the Secretary of State.

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): May I join others in congratulating the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on his award? He is a fellow Leicester City supporter and we need some good news this week after last night. May I also warmly congratulate you and Mrs Bercow, Mr Speaker, on your 14th wedding anniversary, which was yesterday? I noticed that you yawned a couple of times this morning, so it must have been a very good party last night. Perhaps that is why the Norman Shaw South lights are still on today.

The Prime Minister has returned from the Gulf, where she met various kings and other Heads of State. The issue of Yemen must have been discussed. Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early statement by the Prime Minister on her discussions with the Heads of Government on the issue of Yemen, where 80% of the population are still in desperate need of humanitarian care and assistance? We hear about Syria and Iraq a great deal in this House, but not enough about Yemen.

**Mr Lidington:** I am happy to add my congratulations to those expressed by the right hon. Gentleman, both to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and to you and Mrs Bercow, Mr Speaker.

Anybody who saw Fergal Keane's BBC report earlier this week about the situation in Yemen will have been both shocked and moved by the plight of so many families who are suffering grievously in the way described by the right hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did discuss Yemen, among many other issues, with the Gulf leaders during her visit this week. The Government are, of course, committing significant sums—£100 million has so far been committed for this year—to humanitarian relief in Yemen. We are also part funding, through an additional £1 million, the office of the United Nations special envoy for Yemen,

because ultimately it is only through an effective political process that we will be able to bring about a resolution to this appalling conflict.

**Mr Speaker:** I feel very confident that, by one means or another, we will hear about Yemen in the Chamber next week.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): I was delighted to hear that there is to be a debate in this place about broadband, but discussions on broadband invariably tend to focus on rural areas. I have nothing against rural areas, but the reality is that there are pockets of urban areas, including my constituency of Cheltenham, that are affected. There are specific factors that affect urban areas. May we please have a debate on the roll-out of superfast broadband in urban areas?

**Mr Lidington:** I completely understand my hon. Friend's point. The problem that he describes in Cheltenham is also experienced in not spots in other towns and cities, and I know how frustrating it is, both for householders and for businesses whose broadband access is limited because of it. The Chancellor announced in the autumn statement some additional funds that are available to develop high-speed broadband further. I hope that that may provide opportunities for Cheltenham, as well as for other places.

**Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Post offices play a crucial role in many communities, particularly in rural villages such as Blackford in my constituency. May we have a debate about the importance of maintaining small shops and post offices, particularly in rural communities, so that the Post Office and others can see the important economic and social impacts of closures?

**Mr Lidington:** I cannot promise the hon. Lady a debate, although there are questions to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on Tuesday 13 December—next week—and it seems to me that the subject falls within that Department's responsibilities. This Government and their predecessor, the coalition, put provision in place for communities to take over and operate the last retailer or pub in their area, and I know of examples in my own county where local communities have stepped in successfully.

Ultimately, in an age when more and more of us are doing our shopping and accessing services online, there is an inescapable relationship between customer demand for the services provided by small shops and the viability of those shops as businesses. The message to our constituents has, in part, to be: "You need to use those services, or you risk losing them."

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Following a remarkable and brave interview on this morning's edition of "Woman's Hour", which I recommend that hon. Members listen to online, may we have a statement about the delayed-action but deadly threat posed to pupils and teachers by the continuing presence of asbestos in schools?

**Mr Lidington:** I did not hear the interview on "Woman's Hour" this morning, but I will highlight my right hon. Friend's interest to the relevant Minister at the Department for Education and ask for a letter to be sent to him.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is welcome news that Tata Steel and the unions have come to an agreement to keep Port Talbot open, and that the Labour Government in Wales are providing support for training. Does the Leader of the House agree that we ought to have a debate about ensuring that that survival goes forward for our steel industry, and in particular that the workers, in agreeing this deal, do not lose out on their pensions?

**Mr Lidington:** There are some legal requirements that govern pension schemes, which give a measure of protection, and accrued rights under the old pension scheme—I understand that it is proposed to close the scheme—remain preserved. I share the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the agreement that was reached yesterday and pay tribute to those in all political parties in Wales who have fought so hard for such an agreement to be struck. It is good to see that a way appears to have been found to enable steel production to continue at Port Talbot. I will ask Ministers to address the particular point he raises, but we have Business questions next Tuesday and he may want to try his luck at raising this question again then.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): It is almost the first anniversary of the Boxing day floods that devastated my constituency and large parts of west Yorkshire. Before the Christmas recess, will the Leader of the House arrange a statement from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to explain what has been done over the past year to prevent any further such flooding in my constituency and those other communities in west Yorkshire, and to explain what arrangements are in place to ensure a rapid response from authorities—including local authorities—if such terrible floods happen again on bank holidays over the Christmas period?

**Mr Lidington:** Each area now has a designated local authority—either the county or the unitary authority—that has a lead responsibility for co-ordinating flood management and response to flooding. The Government have also ensured in their response to more recent floods in the north-west and south-west of England that Bellwin scheme money is released at a much earlier stage than has sometimes been the case.

Spending on flood management continues, and we recently published a flood resilience strategy that sets out a plan for the longer-term future. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is aware of my hon. Friend's particular concerns about his own area, about which she may wish to reply in more detail to him.

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Liverpool City Council is conducting an online consultation on how to find £90 million more of cuts. That is in addition to the £330 million it has already found since 2010, meaning that it will have lost 70% of its Government support by 2020. May we have a debate in Government time on the disproportionate impact of these cuts on authorities such as Liverpool City Council? In all fairness, will the Leader of the House also come forward and say how the Government can help to alleviate the problem that it has caused?

**Mr Lidington:** It is undoubtedly true that local authorities—whether in northern or southern England, whether Conservative or Labour councils—are having to take some very tough financial decisions about their relative priorities, just as Departments are having to take some very difficult decisions centrally. These are not decisions that any of us—Ministers or local authority leaders—relishes having to take, but they arise from the fact that we inherited an economic wasteland in 2010, with a deficit worse than that accumulated by any Government in our history and one that needed to be paid down as a matter of urgency. It is no good Opposition Members both saying that the Government are moving too slowly to cut the deficit and at the same time resisting each and every measure taken to make the reduction of the deficit possible.

**Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con):** The PISA—programme for international student assessment—results on educational standards were released earlier this week. Sadly, for the 12th year in a row, Wales lags behind the rest of the UK. That caused the head of Ofsted to say that the result was bringing the UK average down, and the Welsh Liberal Democrat Education Minister to say that we “can do better”. May we have a debate on how the Westminster Government can help the devolved nations to do better and to bring up the UK average?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend is right to point to the fact that Wales, sadly, performed less well than England. It is also true that the PISA results revealed a sharp decline in standards in Scottish schools during the past 10 years. The message from Sir Michael Wilshaw, as head of Ofsted, is that the quality of leadership at school and local authority level and the energy given in supporting those leaders by elected politicians, business leaders and others are critical to driving up the standards of education. If we are serious about tackling this country’s long-term economic challenges, including our lack of productivity and the challenge posed to so many forms of employment by digital technology, we need to do everything we can to drive up standards in schools and colleges so that young people are able to prosper in such a rapidly changing economic environment.

**Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP):** Now that the Leader of the House has been identified as our next Prime Minister but one, will he use his new-found authority to insist on a debate on the negotiating strategy for Brexit? While we do not know the destination, subject debates on Brexit are completely irrelevant. Invoking article 50 and going into a time-limited negotiation without at least a broad outline of outcomes means that Monsieur Barnier will make la viande hachée—mincemeat—of this Government. May we have a debate to avoid his meat being minced?

**Mr Lidington:** I have looked at the Order Papers for the period since we came back after the summer recess in September, and I think it is right to say that we have had at least one debate on an aspect of EU exit in every week, or every week but one. We had a full day’s debate yesterday, in which exactly these issues were aired. The Prime Minister has made it clear that the Government will publish more detail about our negotiating objectives next year before we trigger article 50 of the treaties. What we should not and will not do is to give the sort of

detailed exposition that I fear the right hon. Gentleman is seeking. None of the other 27 EU Governments are doing anything like that, and nor should we. You do not reveal your negotiating hand when you are about to start negotiations.

**Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con):** The United Nations estimates that since 9 October 240,000 people have been displaced from Myanmar. The humanitarian disaster unfolding suggests that thousands are having to become refugees in Bangladesh and other parts of south-east Asia. Islamic Relief is doing its best to cope with that humanitarian disaster, but may we have a statement from the Department for International Development—or whichever Department is deemed appropriate—on what the Government will do to help those who are refugees in their own country?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend knows that there is a long and very sad history of communal tension in Myanmar, and in particular a history of discrimination against and persecution of the Rohingya people. When talking to their Burmese opposite numbers, British Ministers, our embassy in the capital and Foreign Office officials constantly raise the need to observe human rights standards and ensure the wellbeing of all communities in Myanmar. We will continue to do that, as well as directing some of our DFID spending programme towards humanitarian relief in that country.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** Periods are an annoyance for every menstruating woman but for homeless women they are far more than that. Sanitary products are simply unaffordable for thousands living on the streets, an issue raised by the campaign the Homeless Period. Will the Leader of the House commit to a debate to discuss ways to relieve the degradation and embarrassment faced by thousands every single day?

**Mr Lidington:** I cannot offer an immediate debate, but the hon. Lady makes a perfectly reasonable case for the subject to be looked at further and I will make sure that the relevant Minister does so.

**Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con):** The news coming out of Port Talbot yesterday is hugely welcome in Corby after months of uncertainty in the steel industry. In the light of that news I pay tribute to Ministers, colleagues across parties and the unions for the constructive work that has taken place to get to this point. I echo the calls of the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). May we have a statement next week to discuss the next steps as we move forward towards reaching a final agreement?

**Mr Lidington:** Throughout his time here since 2015, my hon. Friend has been a formidable spokesman for his constituency and for the interests of the United Kingdom steel industry more generally. I join him in his tribute to all those who made the deal possible. The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will be here next Tuesday and I am sure that there will be questions to him on this subject.

**Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op):** I am sure that the Leader of the House will be aware that earlier this week Women’s Aid and nia launched the first report

from the femicide census, which details the cases of nearly 1,000 women in England and Wales who have been killed by men since 2009. I am aware of the debate later this afternoon, but in response to that report may we have a statement from the Government on what they will be doing to stop any more women being killed at the hands of men through domestic violence?

**Mr Lidington:** The report is important, as the hon. Gentleman says, and Ministers will want to study and reflect on it before announcing any possible policy initiatives. It is good that more people now are willing to come forward and report instances of domestic abuse before they get to the really critical stage he described where someone's life is under threat. It is also true that the police are now much readier to investigate and take action in respect of such cases than might have been the case some years ago. These are always difficult judgments for the police officers and social workers who are dealing with individual families to take, but the key has to be for people who are victims to feel confident that if they come forward the allegations they make will be taken very seriously and investigated properly, and that, where there is evidence, prosecutions will follow.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): A few years ago, it emerged that if the then Prime Minister Tony Blair was indisposed or worse, John Prescott would take over as Prime Minister—the nation slept more soundly because of that. It then emerged that William Hague would take over if the coalition Prime Minister was indisposed or worse. It then emerged that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) would take over from David Cameron. It emerged yesterday, with a superb performance by the Leader of the House, that it is clearly he who would take over as Prime Minister if our Prime Minister was indisposed or worse. May we have a short statement to put that on the record, so we know where everyone stands?

**Mr Lidington:** I sometimes think that my hon. Friend spends his spare hours compiling an actuarial table of senior members of the Government. What I can say to him is that whatever circumstances may arise the Queen's Government will carry on.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Over the past few years, job-finding services, such as cards displaying real jobs and telephones to call about those jobs, have been stripped from jobcentres. With the unexpected news yesterday that the number of Glasgow jobcentres will be cut by 50%, including the jobcentre in Anniesland in my constituency, will the Leader of the House make a statement on the services my constituents should expect in the new planned supercentres?

**Mr Lidington:** These are obviously matters that will primarily be for the management of Jobcentre Plus, but there will be the full range of Jobcentre Plus services at the larger centres. As I said in response to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), I hope the hon. Lady and her colleagues will acknowledge that one reason we need to provide a concentration of services, to help and provide support to those who genuinely—owing to disability, long-term unemployment or whatever other reason—find it hard to get back into work, is that the overall number of people out of work, in Glasgow and

elsewhere in Scotland, has come down very significantly. I do wish that Scottish National party Members would sometimes balance their challenges to the Government with a recognition of the fact that there are now more people in work than ever before.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I was rather disappointed with the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) in relation to Liverpool City Council's spending difficulties. Bristol has just imposed a spending freeze, as it bids to find cuts of £92 million over the next five years. The Mayor is, rightly, being as transparent and open as possible, with a public consultation on what this will mean. Will the Government not emulate that openness by having a debate in Government time on the financial difficulties facing our core cities?

**Mr Lidington:** I am sure there will be plenty of opportunities in various proceedings of the House for these issues to be raised, whether in generic terms or in relation to local authorities. This challenge is not confined to Bristol or any other city, or any other local authority, urban or rural. Nor are central Government Departments in any way exempt. We have to live within our means. We have to pay down the remaining third of the deficit we inherited in 2010; otherwise we will not be able to pay our way in the world.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I join my hon. Friends in asking for a debate in Government time or a statement on jobcentre closures in Glasgow, and in particular on the effects this measure will have on social security claimants. Will the Leader of the House confirm that an equality impact assessment will be published, so that all hon. Members can provide their response to these closures and the effects they will have on claimants?

**Mr Lidington:** The DWP will comply with all its statutory obligations in respect of these changes. It has held initial consultations and briefings with the trade unions, and they will now consult their members about its proposals, but again I just say to the hon. Gentleman that the reason for the consolidation is not just that Glasgow has more small individual jobcentres than other cities in Scotland, but that unemployment in Scotland has come down. The level of employment in Scotland has gone up by 166,000 since 2010, while the youth claimant count has gone down by a very welcome 18,200.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Can we have a debate on environmental protection after we leave the EU, because I am deeply concerned that in the rush towards a red, white and blue Brexit, we will simply get rid of the green?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government remain very committed to our climate change objectives and to improving the UK's environmental performance overall. That is why my right hon. Friend, the now Home Secretary, played a leading role last year, along with the then French Foreign Minister, in agreeing the Paris deal, the first-ever binding global agreement on carbon reduction and climate change. The Government are delivering through their investment in renewable technologies, along with

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the additional measures in the autumn statement on electric and other ultra-low emission vehicles, to ensure that we maintain those green policies that will give us economic and commercial opportunities as well as an improved environment.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House agree that the boundary review should be carried out using the most up-to-date information, and will he therefore set out what is delaying the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill from going into Committee?

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass), the Bill's promoter, did not produce a text for the Bill until three days, I think, before it was set down for Second Reading, and there was no memorandum or other estimate of the costs associated with it. The Government, therefore, in dealing with the request for a money resolution, are doing their own analysis of the costs of implementing the Bill. I say to the hon. Gentleman, however, that for any boundary review there has to be a cut-off point after which the commission can get on with its job. If we were to follow the Labour party's advice and simply abort the current overdue boundary review, we would go into the 2020 election with constituencies that differed vastly in the size of their electorate and on the basis of population figures derived from a consensus that by then would be 20 years old.

**Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): A constituent has brought to my attention an unfortunate situation—perhaps an unintended consequence of current legislation—regarding a protracted period of unemployment. Being desperate for work, he found employment on a short-term contract abroad, only to return home to discover that he was ineligible for jobseeker's allowance. Can we have a statement or debate in Government time on the impact of the Jobseeker's Allowance (Habitual Residence) Amendment Regulations 2013, particularly the three-month rule for UK nationals returning after short-term contracts abroad?

**Mr Lidington:** If the hon. Gentleman would like to give me details of the constituency case, I will ask the relevant DWP Minister to look into it in more detail.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Our state-run nursery schools employ fully qualified teachers and headteachers, and they do a brilliant job, often in deprived areas—I have a number in my constituency, including the Fields children's centre, which I visited a few weeks ago—but proposed Government funding changes are putting their very future at risk. Can we have a statement from the Education Secretary and a debate before these vital services are done irreversible damage?

**Mr Lidington:** The Government are not cutting nursery education but expanding the provision of nursery and other early years education. However, there are Education questions on Monday 19 December, at which the hon. Gentleman can raise these points with Ministers.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): May we have a debate on pancreatic cancer? We recently had pancreatic cancer awareness month. This year, I sadly lost my own uncle to the disease, and my family, like many others across the United Kingdom, are only too aware of how intractable it is and that further funding for research and developments in treatment are badly needed.

**Mr Lidington:** The hon. Lady makes a very good point. One of the real challenges with pancreatic cancer is that the symptoms are often not recognised until it is too late for any kind of effective treatment to be given to the patient. She will have noted that in my statement I announced time for the Backbench Business Committee that is as yet unassigned, so she might want to take this issue up with the Committee Chair.

**Christina Rees** (Neath) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a statement or a debate in Government time on consultation periods? The Government have announced two important consultations, and both last over the Christmas period. Consultation on reforming the soft tissue claims process opened on 17 November and closes on 6 January, which is a day over seven weeks, while consultation on reforming the employment tribunal system opened on 5 December and closes on 21 January, which is one day less than seven weeks. Surely Christmas knocks out about two weeks of that, so we are down to five weeks. The last Labour Government guidance stated that there should be a minimum of 12 weeks and that if it is over Christmas, it should be longer, but this Government amended that to a "proportionate amount of time". Surely five weeks is very little time to respond to these crucial consultations, and both should be extended to over 12 weeks. The Leader of the House needs to understand that the results of consultation are for life, not just for Christmas.

**Mr Lidington:** There is a balance to be struck in any consultation period between allowing sufficient time for representations and ensuring that the timetable allows decisions to be taken and policy to be brought forward. The hon. Lady's suggestion that we should simply write off two weeks over Christmas and the new year seems to me to be somewhat extraordinary. The two timetables that she described allow in each case for several weeks well apart from the Christmas and new year period. At a time when postal services are perhaps not running normally, all these consultations invite responses online, so it is not at all difficult for people to make representations without having to rely on the post.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The Government's announcement on jobcentres yesterday will take Glasgow's jobcentres down from 16 to eight, and there will be consultation only on two of those closures across the city. Members of Parliament had to read about this in the press, and it took seven hours after that story breaking before a Minister bothered to contact me. Given that, does the Leader of the House agree that we need a statement? If he is so confident about accessibility as between closing jobcentres and remaining jobcentres, will he tell me how far it is from Castlemilk to Newlands, and how long the journey would take him on a bus?

**Mr Lidington:** What my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is proposing is to bring the distribution of jobcentres in Glasgow in line with the pattern that already applies in other Scottish cities. I note that there is no outcry from Scottish National party Members about opening additional jobcentres in other cities. It seems to me that what the Department is proposing is entirely reasonable. Its objective is to provide an enhanced service to those people who need help from jobcentres.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) set out and as we know from the Transport Secretary's own words, the decision not to pass suburban rail services to the Mayor of London was based on party politics and not on evidence. Can the Leader of the House commit the Government to a genuine and impartial assessment of the case for devolution based on the needs of London and the south-east, not on one man's prejudices?

**Mr Lidington:** As the Secretary of State for Transport said on Monday, he has invited the Mayor of London and TfL to engage in detailed discussions about how to work much more closely together in the management of commuter routes. I repeat again that those routes do not serve just London constituencies and communities; they are absolutely critical to the travel-to-work arrangements of tens of thousands of people living outside the Greater London area, whom they also serve. It is only right that those people, too, should have some democratic route through which to challenge and to hold to account the people responsible for taking decisions about their railway.

**Steven Paterson** (Stirling) (SNP): During the summer, I conducted a consultation in my constituency about VAT reductions for tourism businesses. It was made clear to me that we could create more jobs and put more money into the local economy and, indeed, the national Exchequer if we targeted those businesses, but this week I received a letter from the Treasury whose contents could be summarised as "no". May we have a debate on the issue so that we can draw attention to the benefits of pursuing such a policy, which would enable local economies like mine to grow?

**Mr Lidington:** I am delighted if the hon. Gentleman has become a convert to the cause of lower taxation, although I think he may have a job of work to do to persuade others in his party. However, there is also the necessity for any Government to raise revenue in order to pay for services, which he and his colleagues keep arguing to me should receive additional funding, not less. The Government are committed to trying to reduce taxation wherever and whenever they are able to do so, but we must live within our means as a country, and that means raising the revenue to pay for public services and pay down the deficit, which is still too high.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): A constituent of mine, Mr Singleton, approached me recently because he had been told by his energy supplier, E.ON, that his warm home discount payment would not reach him until May. Happily we have now been assured that the payment will be received earlier than that, but E.ON has said that other customers may still not receive their payments before 31 May 2017. At a

time when fuel poverty is such a problem, it is totally unacceptable for those payments to be delayed for so long. May we have an urgent debate on the issue?

**Mr Lidington:** I hope that the management of E.ON have heard the criticisms that the hon. Gentleman has made on behalf of his constituent, and will do whatever they can to speed up those payments. One reason for welcoming the ability of customers to switch between energy suppliers is that it enables them to move their energy accounts to suppliers which they believe will give them a better and speedier service, but, as I have said, I hope that the company will take note of the case that he has described, which I suspect may apply to a great many other people as well.

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Mr Speaker,

"you've got the Saudis, Iran, everybody, moving in and puppeteering and playing proxy wars, and it's a tragedy to watch it." Those were not my words but those of our Foreign Secretary, in footage released by *The Guardian* yesterday evening. May we have a debate in Government time on the role that we are playing in that tragedy, not as innocent bystanders but as the kingdom's largest arms trading partner?

**Mr Lidington:** Let me say to the hon. Lady that people in this country are safer from terrorism because of the close co-operation that we have with Saudi Arabia and the other states of the Gulf Co-operation Council. They are critical allies in that work, and it is right that we should continue the strong alliance that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was seeking to cement when she visited the GCC summit this week.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief, of which I am the chair—I should declare that interest—and Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK are concerned about the potential use of anti-terror laws by the Pakistani Government, given that in January, under those laws, 81-year-old Abdul Shakoor was sentenced to eight years in prison for possessing copies of the Holy Koran. The police have gatecrashed a publications office and raided the Ziaul Islam Press, seizing printing plates of the Tehrik-e-Jadid magazine. All that reflects the Pakistan authorities' relentless targeting of the Ahmadiyya community simply on the grounds of their faith. May I ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the issue?

**Mr Lidington:** Pakistan, like many other countries, faces a genuine challenge from ruthless organised terrorist groups. There is always a tricky balance to be sought between having and exercising powers that will be effective against a real threat from terrorists and not trampling on basic civil rights. That balance, and complaints about abuse of human rights in Pakistan through the application of anti-terrorism laws, are issues that Ministers and Government officials raise constantly in their conversations with Pakistani counterparts.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): We all agree that the National Audit Office does a great job of scrutiny, but last year 60% of its 108 investigations

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and reviews excluded Scotland. Given the earlier non-answers we got from the Deputy Leader of the House, can the Leader of the House give me a statement with a detailed explanation of why no Barnett consequentials arise from the contribution of over £300 million towards the NAO's work? We will request a review of that allocation.

**Mr Lidington:** The NAO is not directed by the Government; it is an independent body that sets its own priorities. I will refer the hon. Gentleman's question to the Comptroller and Auditor General and ask him to write to the hon. Gentleman with the explanation he is seeking.

## Points of Order

11.49 am

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We will come to the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond). There are various points of order, and first I will take those of which I have had notice.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During the urgent question on rail infrastructure on Tuesday, the Transport Secretary was asked five times why he had not devolved rail services to the Mayor of London, as agreed between his Government and the previous Mayor. His answer each time was that there were commercial and operational reasons for not so doing. Yesterday a letter from the Transport Secretary emerged which gave the actual reason for his opposing devolution as being that he

“would like to keep suburban rail services out of the clutches of any future Labour Mayor.”

Mr Speaker, Members should be able to rely on the answers given by Ministers at the Dispatch Box as being as accurate as they can make them. What steps can I take to get the Minister to correct the record to reflect his actual reasoning, however tawdry that may have been?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his courtesy in giving me advance notice of his intended point of order. I have a twofold answer. First, every Member of this House is responsible for the veracity of what he or she says in it, and it is incumbent upon a Member, upon discovery of a mistake, to correct it; that applies to Ministers as it applies to anybody else. Secondly, the hon. Gentleman will understand why I do not wish to delve into the detail of the matter, and I certainly do not seek to adjudicate between the hon. Gentleman making an accusation and any Minister who might seek to defend himself or herself against it. All I would say, perhaps delphically, is that what the hon. Gentleman has said about a political motivation and what the Minister has said are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

**Mr Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order is not dissimilar to the previous one. Mine relates to the response given by the Department for Transport to the urgent question tabled on Monday by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) in respect of Southern rail. My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who is present, and I asked the Minister in question whether the Government's intention was still to devolve rail commuter services to Transport for London. We were not given any answer. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) has just said, clearly the Secretary of State for Transport has already made up his mind about that on the basis of party political reasons, and, secondly, having provided no answer, we then found it in the *Evening Standard* the day after.

I know you, Mr Speaker, place a premium on Ministers coming here and giving information to this House when questions are asked, not providing it in the newspapers afterwards. Frankly, I am utterly exasperated at this,

because my constituents will take grave exception to Ministers playing party politics with the misery they are facing day in, day out on this line. I would be very grateful for your guidance, Mr Speaker, on how we can ensure Ministers give the right information to this House and do not fail to give us the information we require.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point of order, and of course I remember well the exchanges to which he refers as they took place only three days ago. My off-the-cuff response is twofold. First, the absence of comprehensive answers to questions posed, under Governments of a variety of complexions, is not without precedent. Secondly, it is difficult to know—and it is not for the Speaker to judge—at what point a Government have decided on a policy and decided to communicate it. However, it does seem a tad strange if something is not communicated in the House in response to a specific question but is then communicated to the media a very short time afterwards. As I have said, it is not for me to judge in each case, but I really do think that if Ministers wish to avert the potentially embarrassing scenario of another urgent question being tabled on the same matter, with the possibility of a Minister having to come to answer it a second time, it would be wise for them to factor that consideration into their calculations of how to conduct themselves.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I think that that is the fairest way in which I can deal with this question, but the right hon. Gentleman was a co-applicant for the urgent question the other day, and his constituency is directly affected by this matter, so of course I will hear what he has to say.

**Tom Brake:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. You will be aware that my constituents are suffering chaotic services on Southern rail at the moment, and they were seeking salvation in Transport for London taking responsibility for those services. Can you advise me whether there is any way in which I can secure a transport outcome for my constituents that is based on the best policy rather than on a political priority for the Government?

**Mr Speaker:** Notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's desire to invest me with great wisdom and powers in these matters, I am not sure that I am best placed to advise him on this. He is a former Deputy Leader of the House and he will be well aware of the upcoming debate on matters to be raised before the Adjournment, to which he may wish to contribute, although he might be perturbed by the absence of a responsible departmental Minister to give him a substantive reply. If he wants substantively to raise this issue and to obtain a reply, an Adjournment debate of his own might be his best salvation. I have a hunch that he will shortly be beetling across to the Table Office to make such an application, and he might find that his application is successful.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady is in a state of some perturbation, and she did give me notice of her point of order, so let us hear it.

**Paula Sherriff:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. You have ruled on a number of occasions that, as a courtesy to the House, Members should inform one another when they are visiting another Member's constituency on official business. I discovered last week that the Minister for Security, the hon. Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace), had visited my constituency in his ministerial capacity. I discovered this when reading an article that was later published in my local newspaper. I subsequently raised the lack of notification with his office, which told me that it did not regard this obligation as applying to Ministers. This is particularly disappointing, given that I have often raised the serious issues that were the subject of his visit, and I would have welcomed the opportunity to discuss them with him prior to and during his visit. I am sure that I do not need to refer you to paragraph 10.9 of the ministerial code, Mr Speaker, but I ask you to clarify that this convention does indeed apply to Ministers and advise me of what recourse a Member has when the ministerial code is broken. What advice could you offer to the Minister of State and his office on this matter? Is there any further training or guidance that could be given to Ministers regarding their obligations to this House?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her point of order, and I can offer her some comfort in the matter. The short answer is that the obligation most certainly does apply to Ministers, and I am frankly staggered to hear it suggested—

**The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis):** Shocking!

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman says he finds it shocking that anyone would suppose otherwise. I thought that this was very well known in the House.

Let me give the hon. Lady a substantive reply. It is a long-standing convention that Members should notify each other before visiting others' constituencies in a public capacity. Obviously, if one Member is going to another's constituency for a private dinner party, the obligation does not apply, but we are talking about the conduct of public business. The requirement for Ministers is enshrined in the ministerial code, and Ministers really ought to be familiar with and ready to adhere to it. I agree that it is a most unsatisfactory situation when notice is not given, and I urge Members on both sides, and Ministers in particular, to observe that traditional courtesy. The point has been made, and I know that the Leader of the House, who is extremely assiduous and highly respected in this place for his courtesy—I can say that with some personal knowledge as he has been my constituency neighbour for the best part of two decades—takes these matters very seriously and that he will do all he can to ensure that other Ministers behave with the courtesy that he customarily exhibits.

**Alex Salmond** (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Two weeks ago, the Leader of the House was reminded from across the Chamber, not least by yourself, that the overwhelming custom, practice and precedent is that when Bills pass Second Reading, as the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill did, they should be duly certified and go to Committee without undue delay. Today, the Leader of the House expanded on his excuses for that not happening, including

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reasons that he did not give two weeks ago. Every single one of us knows that this is nothing more than political chicanery. Yesterday, the Leader of the House reached the heights of deputising for the Prime Minister. Today, he is reaching the depths and not fulfilling the proper responsibilities of a Leader of the House. How can we persuade him to mend his ways?

**Mr Speaker:** The Leader of the House is entitled to respond if he wishes. If he does not wish to do so, it is fair to say that it is very much the norm that the Government should come forward with the appropriate resolution. It is not strictly a matter for the Chair if that does not happen, but knowing the right hon. Gentleman as I do and how familiar he is with that long-standing requirement, and knowing his tendency, quite prudently, only to ask a question when he already knows the answer, any member of the Government is taking some risk in persisting in failing to do what is expected. I sense that the right hon. Gentleman will, to put it bluntly, keep banging on about the matter until he gets what he wants.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have two brief points. First, I think the Leader of the House perhaps inadvertently misled the House in response to questions from my hon. Friends about jobcentre closures in Glasgow. He stated that the plans would be subject to full consultation, but they will not. The Government plan to consult on only two of eight closures across the city, and I cannot stress enough to the House how devastating that news is.

Secondly, Mr Speaker, will you advise me and hon. Friends who represent Glasgow constituencies what recourse is open to us to put right the gross discourtesy that was shown to us yesterday by the Department for Work and Pensions? We had to read about the closures in the press, and it took Ministers more than seven hours to get in touch with us. We consider that to be grossly disrespectful, so can you advise on whether any recourse is open to us in that respect?

**Mr Speaker:** To some extent, the hon. Gentleman has obtained his own salvation in airing his discontent on the Floor of the House. The relevant Minister is not in a position immediately to reply so that the hon. Gentleman would be able to establish some facts on the ground that are to his advantage. I was not familiar with the point of detail that the hon. Gentleman highlighted about two matters being the subject of consultation rather than the full eight. I hope that he will forgive me if I say that that really is not a matter for me. I cannot be expected to get into the interstices of the system, but it is normal in matters of this kind that affect constituencies for the Members affected to be given the courtesy of advance notification rather than having to read about matters in the newspapers. It may well be that some rather greater discipline within ministerial offices is required to avoid a repetition of that rather unfortunate occurrence.

**Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. On yesterday's decision about jobcentre closures in Glasgow, my understanding is that ministerial criteria determine whether

or not a closure goes to public consultation, and there is some dubiety about at least two of these. It is my view, and that of my hon. Friend, that four of the eight should be going to public consultation. Do we have any recourse to raise that with Ministers? Alternatively, have you had any indication of whether a Department for Work and Pensions Minister is coming to the House today to discuss this matter?

**Mr Speaker:** I must confess that I suffer from some ignorance on that matter. It is an enormously important point, but not one on which I have any knowledge. The hon. Gentleman asks whether there is any recourse for him, and the answer is yes: he should table a written question, narrowly focused on that matter, to try to extract a substantive answer. He is quite a terrier and I am sure that this is not beyond him.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is about answers I have received from the Secretary of State for Scotland, and I had hoped to raise the matter yesterday. I asked an oral question in the Chamber advising him that I had written to the Chancellor suggesting that LIBOR money be used for opencast coal restoration, asking him whether he had had similar discussions with the Chancellor and challenging him on whether he had done anything about a previous pledge in the 2015 Green Book. The answer I got was:

"The hon. Gentleman knows that I—and, indeed, the UK Government—have done a great deal to work with East Ayrshire Council to ensure that opencast restoration could proceed in that area".—[*Official Report*, 23 November 2016; Vol. 617, c. 879-880.]

He put great emphasis in that exchange on "a great deal".

Not because I am cynical but because I wanted to give credit where credit is due, I submitted three written questions asking how much money the UK Government have spent on opencast restoration, what actions they had taken and how many meetings the Secretary of State had had with the Chancellor. I got a single grouped answer which did not give any figures or cost information at all. The Secretary of State said that he had had a number of formal and informal meetings with Government colleagues. He went on to say:

"BEIS officials have participated in the Scottish Government's Coal Restoration Working Group which agreed a way forward".

The reply included a link to a record of a meeting, but funnily enough no UK Government official had been at that meeting. He also said that the Coal Authority provides advice.

I therefore had to submit a follow-up written question. I apologise for the detail here, but I will try to be brief. That question tried to pin down some answers about what funding had been provided and what future funding would be provided—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are indescribably grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising these important matters. No one could accuse him of excluding from his attempted point of order any point that he thinks might be, in any way, at any time or anywhere, judged to be material. There is a comprehensiveness about his approach that is as impressive as it is infuriating. I do not think I have ever said this before: there is a sense in which I share his pain, but there are very few new precedents in this place.

He says with open-eyed astonishment that he put down several questions which were treated as a sort of job lot by the Minister, but I very much doubt his experience is any worse than mine. Many, many years ago, long before I had the privilege of occupying the Chair, I tabled 60 questions to the then Minister for Europe, who had the extreme temerity to provide me with a dismissive one-word reply to all 60. I simply returned to the drawing board and came up with a further series of questions, on the basis that I could thereby occupy the Minister's attention in such a way that he would be doing less damage responding to me than he might be doing in other ways.

What I say to the hon. Gentleman is that the content of ministerial answers is the responsibility of the Minister concerned. If a Minister felt, with hindsight, that an answer had been inaccurate, it would be open to him or her to correct the record. I realise that the hon. Gentleman finds the answers he has received unsatisfactory, but I am afraid that that is not a point of order for the Chair. He asks how he can get decent answers out of Ministers. That is a question that has taxed many of us, myself included, over the years, but the best approach is for the hon. Gentleman to use persistence and ingenuity, both of which he has demonstrated he possesses in abundance. Moreover, I suggest to him that he should seek the advice of the Table Office. One thing I learned early in my time in this place is that the staff of the Table Office are there to help. If he is told that his approach is not in order or is not the best approach, he should then proceed to ask the follow-up question, "How can I best go about the matter of inquiry?" The Table Office staff are both public spirited and expert, and they will be able to help him. His visits there will profit him.

## Backbench Business

### UN International Day: Violence against Women

*[Relevant documents: Third Report of the Women and Equalities Committee, Sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools, HC 91, and the Government response, HC 826.]*

12.10 pm

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op):  
I beg to move,

That this House notes the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence; further notes that violence against women is a human rights violation and prevents women and girls fulfilling their full potential; recognises that an estimated one in three women experience physical or sexual violence worldwide, but that violence against women and girls is not inevitable, and that prevention is possible and essential; and calls on the Government to work with other governments around the world to adopt comprehensive laws addressing violence against women and gender-based inequality and discrimination, to provide women-centred, specialist services to all survivors, and to fund key education and prevention programmes so that violence against women and girls is ended once and for all.

I thank hon. Members from all parts of the House who have supported this debate today. They include: my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), the hon. Members for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller). I also thank other Members who are here to contribute to the debate. I particularly wish to recognise the work of the right hon. Member for Basingstoke who is Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee and whose report is also being debated today.

I am proud that, as a Parliament, we are debating this motion, because it is vital that Parliament plays its part on the world stage in combating violence against women in all its forms, at home and abroad. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women describes violence against women and girls as

"any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty".

The 16 days of action, which have seen events and campaigns across the country and the world, end on 10 December, Human Rights Day. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the 16 days of action.

Tackling violence against women has to be a cross-party issue, and the delivery of strategies has to be based on what works and has to go across Parliaments. In 2009, the Labour Government published the first violence against women and girls strategy, which was described as marking a major shift to joined-up policy. The current Government strategy continues that approach, but the challenge that we face now is ensuring that we have a complete strategy and that we turn that strategy into outcomes.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the hon. Lady agree that perhaps one of the best examples of a cross-party approach is the support for the Istanbul convention? Does she hope that the Government will fully adopt that convention?

**Seema Malhotra:** The right hon. Gentleman leads me directly on to my next point. I was about to congratulate the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) on the publication of her Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Ratification of Convention) Bill, which will have its Second Reading next week. The UK signed the convention in June 2012, but has not yet ratified it. That issue was the subject of a letter today to the Prime Minister signed by more than 75 Labour Members of Parliament. Let me just take a moment to thank the IcChange campaign for its work on this issue, and to recognise the early-day motion of the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), which was signed by Members from across the House.

In opening this debate, I wish to make three main points: the first is the growing scale of the challenge at home and abroad; the second is our call to the Government to do more on prevention through relationship and sex education and ratifying the Istanbul convention; and the third is the culture shift across society, businesses and public services that is needed to lift the lid on violence against women and girls and to engage all in the role that they can play in eliminating that violence in all its forms.

Let me start with the scale of the challenge. Violence against women and girls is rising at home and abroad. Worldwide, an estimated one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence—that is a staggering statistic. The World Health Organisation highlights the fact that, in addition to being a human rights issue, violence against women is a major public health issue. Women who have experienced violence are more likely to have babies with low birth weights and to experience depression. Each year in the UK, up to 3 million women experience violence. On average, one woman in Britain dies at the hands of a man every three days. We also know that around one in 10 domestic violence incidents involves men as victims. That number is significant, but the overall figures show the scale and gendered nature of domestic and sexual violence. The cost to our economy is estimated to be around £25 billion. This scourge is present in every community across our nation. Domestic and sexual violence knows no boundaries—of age, geography, ethnicity or social background.

I want to share a few, relatively recent, examples from my constituency. I was approached by a lady who had suffered domestic violence for many years. Eventually, she found the courage to leave her husband, but was unable to care for her children who were then taken away. The abuse continued and she now lives in terror of her ex-husband and his family. She feels unsupported by the police, and scrimps and saves to afford new door locks and security. Her future feels uncertain, and she lives a nightmare every day.

Another told me how, six years after leaving her husband who had an alcohol addiction, he recently reappeared and threatened her elderly parents. She is at a loss as to how to protect them as well as herself. The impact of domestic abuse is borne not just by female victims,

but by children. SafeLives estimates that 130,000 children live in homes in which a parent faces serious harm or death at the hands of their partner or ex-partner. Those children can go on to replicate the behaviour that they have seen. One mother told me of her experience. She said that her teenage son was starting to behave in the way that he had seen his father behave. He was lucky enough to respond to her challenging him, but she knows that the story is not over for him, and is now seeking support for him as the trauma that he experienced plays out in his life as he reaches adulthood.

The challenges that we now face in the provision of child and adult mental health services are having an impact on outcomes. One mother told me that she had to wait a year for support for her six-year-old son who had witnessed her abuse. That just cannot be right.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that not enough resources are being invested in shelters and refuges for women? More importantly, another by-product of domestic violence is that it affects not only a child's character but a child's education. If I were a kid at school, I would be more worried about what was happening to my mother than about my lessons.

**Seema Malhotra:** My hon. Friend has supported refuges and other services that help his constituents. I will, if I may, refer here to the work of Refuge and Women's Aid in challenging the cuts to refuges and the support for women and their families. It is horrifying that, in recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of women being turned away from support because of the lack of provision.

My hon. Friend mentioned schools and educational attainment. I would extend that to the role that schools are playing in picking up the pieces. One school told me that it estimated that five children in each class were experiencing or witnessing domestic abuse in some form at home. I was told the very sad story of how a school was working with a mother who kept an emergency escape bag in a cupboard at the school for when she felt she had to flee her home.

Such cases are far from unique. Women's Aid highlights some staggering statistics. The crime survey of England and Wales found that 27.1% of women had experienced domestic abuse since the age of 16. The rate of domestic violence crime against women has doubled each year since 2009, and there were over 100,000 prosecutions for domestic abuse in 2015-16, the highest number ever recorded.

It is a year since the new offence of coercive control came into force. Domestic abuse goes beyond physical violence. Using the law effectively will require greater understanding. I would be grateful if, in her closing remarks, the Minister outlined the steps that the Government are taking to improve training for statutory agencies so that some of the new offences can be put to greater use.

Online abuse is a growing problem. The scale and nature of domestic and other abuse are changing. Online abuse is combining with offline abuse. A survey by Women's Aid shows that over 45% of survivors of domestic violence had also experienced online abuse. The existing legal frameworks should be examined to ensure that the law is up to date in all areas to provide protection against online abuse as well as offline abuse.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that Facebook, Twitter and other social media outlets need to take responsibility for some of the abuse, and that they do not regulate enough? More regulation through law or through their own work would be a positive step to support women and girls who are subject to abuse, as well as other groups that are abused via the social media network.

**Seema Malhotra**: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Later I shall mention the work of the Reclaim the Internet campaign chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper). My hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) highlights the need for a code of practice for technology companies and social media providers to ensure that survivors of domestic abuse and other forms of violence are protected online, and that other vulnerable users are not subject to abuse that goes unchallenged or unaddressed.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that codes of conduct already exist? There are rules of the road that the social media platforms ostensibly trumpet as monitoring their conduct online, but they do not enforce them to the extent that they should.

**Seema Malhotra**: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. There are good and emerging codes of practice, but they do not go far enough and they certainly are not enforced sufficiently. Further work could be done—for example, the Government could investigate the regulation or closing down of websites that promote or profit from image-based sexual abuse, an approach advocated by Women's Aid. We could also look at the extent to which criminal and civil sanctions are used in cases of domestic abuse, such as domestic violence protection orders and non-molestation orders, which can be applied to routinely restrain a perpetrator from making digital contact with a survivor. I hope to hear some response from the Minister on that.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the problem is that the offence of online abuse, and also physical abuse, sometimes crosses international borders, and many of the websites are hosted outside the UK? Will she join me in asking the Minister to offer us in her response to the debate assurances that, as we leave the European Union, the security arrangements that we have in place through European security agencies, as well as our other international security arrangements, will be protected and resourced so that they are up to the task?

**Seema Malhotra**: My hon. Friend is right. Having worked in the creative industries on some of the issues surrounding the prevention and addressing of abuse online, I experienced the complexity of reaching agreement. The more we work together with other Governments and lead on that, the more that will help us to move forward on the complex issue of policy and regulation. My hon. Friend points out the potential risks to such cross-government working that could come from Brexit, and I hope the Minister will deal with that in her remarks and give the House confidence that our ratification and implementation of the Istanbul convention will not be affected by impending Brexit.

I want to mention the Femicide Census. It is a horror that we record the details of women killed by men. The initiative was launched in partnership with Women's Aid, based on the information collected by Karen Ingala Smith on her blog "Counting Dead Women", where she began collating details of women killed by men. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley has spoken powerfully about this in the House on previous occasions. This week a new report was released which covers seven years and collates information on 936 women in England and Wales killed by fatal male violence. The report makes a number of recommendations to the Government. I am confident that we will hear from Ministers about their response.

I recognise the work done by local authorities across the country, even as they grapple with cuts. Data for my own local authority from the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime show that in the year to September 2016, there were over 4,400 more notifiable offences than in the year to September 2015. There has been a rise in domestic offences, sexual offences and rape offences. The lead Hounslow councillor on this portfolio is Sue Sampson. In 1976 Sue's sister Maureen Roberts was shot dead, aged 23, by her estranged husband at her place of work, West Middlesex hospital, which still serves my constituency.

Maureen had become a victim of domestic violence shortly after she got married three years earlier. Straight after her husband shot her, he turned the gun on himself, killing himself. Sue still lives with the shock and the horror of what happened, like many others who are victims of these attacks on women. Such killings are increasingly being documented. Victims live with those stories for the rest of their lives. We have come far with the changes in the law, but, as this week's Femicide Census shows, such violence still happens all too often.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a very powerful speech on this incredibly important subject. She is right to mention local councils. Stafford Borough Council has worked with Staffordshire Women's Aid to create a new women's refuge in Stafford. Does the hon. Lady agree that this is a fine example of partnership working, which in this case is under the inspirational leadership of Dickie James?

**Seema Malhotra**: The hon. Gentleman has made his point extremely well, and he is absolutely right. Indeed, his local authority, like Hounslow and others, is at the frontline of prevention, early intervention and the provision of support. However, like Hounslow, many authorities will face huge challenges in tackling both the reduction in funding across statutory and non-statutory organisations and, indeed, the integration of services.

As the data show, the scale of the challenge is increasing, and the pattern of violence seems to begin even earlier. The recent inquiry and very powerful report by the Women and Equalities Committee found that almost a third of 16 to 18-year-olds say they have experienced unwanted sexual touching at school. Some 59% of girls and young women aged 13 to 21 said in 2014 that they had faced some sort of sexual harassment at school or college in the previous year. We also need to reflect on the fact that the nature of violence can change. Last year, the revenge porn helpline received almost 4,000 calls, with children as young as 11 making those calls.

[Seema Malhotra]

The battle is being fought hard. We are lucky to have the organisations we do, and the individuals working tirelessly in them mean there is cause for hope. I want to acknowledge and thank organisations including Refuge and Women's Aid, whose Save Our Services campaign I have mentioned and which also has the very effective Child First campaign. Respect deals with the needs of perpetrators. I should also mention Southall Black Sisters, FORWARD and the End Violence Against Women Coalition, as well as female genital mutilation campaigners Hibo Wardere, Nimco Ali, Leyla Hussein and Fahma Mohamed, who, aged 19, was recognised by Bristol University this year with an honorary doctorate for her work in driving forward a very effective campaign.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): A very powerful point is being made. The work of women's refuges was mentioned, and I want to highlight the fact that the Government are providing £20 million for women's refuges to help them with their valuable work. I would urge people to applaud that and to take advantage of it. What would the hon. Lady say about that?

**Seema Malhotra**: I have worked on these issues in Parliament for a number of years, and I am sure the hon. Lady will understand that while I acknowledge that support, I also question whether it goes far enough, whether it will be sustained so that organisations can plan sufficiently and whether it has been funded through cuts in other areas. There are complex issues around funding for refuges, of which the hon. Lady will be well aware. Supporting those services absolutely has to be a priority for any Government so that we can ensure we provide support for women at their most vulnerable moments.

The Everyday Sexism campaign has campaigned hard and shown very effectively how women face threats, harassment and violence in every walk of life. The Reclaim the Internet campaign, which I mentioned, has a really important role to play, because the scale of the technology in our lives, and the way it can be used to the advantage of victims and to support them, but also against them, must be understood and tackled by lawmakers and regulators. I also want to put on record my appreciation for SafeLives, the White Ribbon Campaign, Imkaan and others which remind us that gender-based violence is not inevitable and that prevention is not only possible but essential.

Let me turn to why we hope the Government will do much more and why we need them to do more.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: Just before the hon. Lady comes to a very large chunk of speech, I should point out to her that I fully appreciate that she has taken a lot of interventions and that we are not under tremendous time pressure, but she has taken very much longer than the time normally allocated for the opening speech in a debate such as this. I am not suggesting she should finish immediately, but perhaps she should just have a couple of minutes more.

**Seema Malhotra**: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. You will be pleased to hear that I am very close indeed to concluding.

As I mentioned, I and other Labour Members wrote to the Prime Minister regarding the Istanbul convention, and an update on the issue from the Minister today would be very welcome.

I welcome the Government's moves this week on the new measures to support victims of stalking. There was also the announcement of new funding and guidelines. Obviously, there is much work to do with the national statement of expectations to ensure that what has been announced actually makes a difference and addresses the challenges we have heard about from services across the country. We need to ensure that best practice that is highlighted is promoted and extended, and that those providing services through local authorities have some guarantees that they will have resources in the future.

I want to refer to the urgent need for compulsory and age-appropriate relationship and sex education, and I recognise the work my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) has done on this recently. I also want to explain why it is so urgent to focus on healthy and consensual relationships. I met the family of Hollie Gazzard, who founded the Hollie Gazzard Trust in memory of 20-year-old Hollie, who was killed in 2014 by an ex-partner. They highlighted how she did not speak out about the abuse, and nor did she understand the signs of a controlling relationship. They believe very strongly that relationship and sex education in school could have saved their daughter, and that is a message they take out through their organisation. There is an urgent need for this provision, and I fail to understand how, after six years, the Government have failed to implement what all the evidence shows is absolutely necessary. Where there is relationship and sex education in schools, it is clearly patchwork and clearly not good enough, and there is an urgent need to join up delivery on not only this issue, but on the Government's strategy on violence against women and girls as a whole.

My final point is about the need for a shift in the culture in our country and in the public awareness of the role we can all play. I want to mention the excellent work of Croydon Council, which has taken this issue mainstream by engaging with businesses and other organisations on how they can sometimes be the first line of support for employees who are victims. Building awareness and doing work on joining up provision is not always about resources; it is also about a shift in culture, and that can save lives.

I want to close with a powerful quotation of Ban Ki-moon, which I believe is important for us to note:

"Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, public health pandemic and serious obstacle to sustainable development. It imposes large-scale costs on families, communities and economies. The world cannot afford to pay this price."

12.38 pm

**Mrs Maria Miller** (Basingstoke) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), and I congratulate her on leading this debate. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it in the first place.

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation—the hon. Lady is absolutely right—and it is something that women confront in every country across the globe. However, whichever side of the House we sit on, I think we can recognise and be proud of this Government's

record, and particularly the Prime Minister's commitment to these issues. She has shown her commitment, on a very personal level, to ending violence against women—not just with warm words, but with very clear action. Ever since I have been an MP—and probably for as long as you have, Madam Deputy Speaker—she has shown that commitment, and we need more countries to have the sort of leadership we have in this country. I was reminded of that only yesterday when I spoke to my counterpart, Mehrezia Labidi, chair of the parliamentary women's committee in Tunisia, who has been instrumental in pressing forward with a Bill on women's rights and gender-based violence which would be ground-breaking legislation in the Arab world and deserves all our support.

I would like to echo the words of the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston in paying tribute to the extraordinary work of organisations such as Women's Aid, Refuge, ActionAid, the End Violence Against Women Coalition, and the Everyday Sexism Project. They are representative of the kind of civil society that we take for granted but does not always exist in other countries. One of our challenges is how we take forward that sort of learning into other countries around the world.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Miller:** Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me if I make some speedy progress? I do not want to incur the wrath of Madam Deputy Speaker. *[Laughter.]* I know her well.

The Government's record at home should be recognised across the House. Their violence against women strategy, which was delivered in March, means that in the UK we really do have a clear practical strategy in place, not only to support victims but to bring perpetrators to justice. New offences have gone hand in hand with work to change culture. It is this Prime Minister who put in place the Modern Slavery Act 2015 to tackle a crime that affects so many women. However, we still have 1.3 million women in this country who experienced domestic violence in the past year, and 400,000 who have been victims of sexual assault. The announcements made by my hon. Friend the Minister yesterday show that this Government are in no way complacent. Measures such as the new stalking and civil protection orders, and the provision of more funding for better local support services, show that this is under constant review.

We should also recognise the work that has been done in other parts of Government. The UK has advocated a stand-alone goal on gender equality as part of the sustainable development goals. The Women and Equalities Committee, which I chair, will look at this in detail, because we need to make sure that these commitments are being put into practice here at home. The Department for International Development has boosted the support to tackle violence against women by increasing by 60% its funding for work in Africa, particularly around the issues of female genital mutilation, and—

**Patrick Grady** *rose—*

**Tom Brake** *rose—*

**Mrs Miller:** Hold on, boys. *[Laughter.]* DFID has also supported work on the Freedom Programme, which means that over 200,000 people, particularly those in

domestic households and those in the garment industry in South Asia and the middle east, have been helped who would previously have faced slavery and exploitation.

**Tom Brake:** I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way to one of the boys. I welcome the measures the Government are introducing in relation to FGM, particularly the requirement for the NHS to collate data sets on it. Does she have any evidence that that is starting to feed through to an increased level of prosecutions, for instance?

**Mrs Miller:** Yes, I was going to come on to that. The right hon. Gentleman is stealing my next lines somewhat.

The crime survey statistics show that the number of women experiencing domestic violence is the lowest since the survey began, and there is a downward trend in the prevalence of sexual assaults. At the same time, we are seeing the highest ever levels of convictions for crimes of violence against women. While there is much more to do, the direction of travel is to be applauded. It remains the case, however, that 1.3 million women, potentially, will be listening to this debate and thinking that there is more we could be doing for them.

**Chris Elmore:** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Miller:** I feel that I should now give way to the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady).

**Patrick Grady:** I thank the right hon. Lady for giving way and for the very substantial contribution that she is making. Does she agree that among the different things we can do, it is important that the Government ratify the Istanbul convention in order to show global leadership? Yesterday, in a Westminster Hall debate, we heard about the situation in South Sudan, where 70% of the women in the capital city of Juba have experienced sexual assault during the conflict in that country. It is absolutely horrific. We need to show global leadership by ratifying the convention.

**Mrs Miller:** The hon. Gentleman is right. We have shown global leadership in signing the convention, but we are waiting to ratify it. Having been a Minister in the position of considering how we do so, I know that ministerial colleagues will be continuing to unpick the complexities of making sure that ratification is done in the right way.

I want finally to make two very swift points, because many right hon. and hon. Members want to come in on this debate. I make no bones about it: I am going to focus on two issues that really affect us here in the UK, because while it is right that we look out to the world, we have to look on our own back doorstep as well. One of the biggest challenges of our lives is the way in which we tackle the online world. We need to do more about this. Children now spend more time online than watching television. New and more inventive ways are being presented to us with regard to how perpetrators of violence against women and girls act. Forty-five per cent. of domestic violence survivors experience abuse online, and that abuse is really difficult to escape.

I welcome the legislation that this Government have introduced on online revenge pornography. I was pleased to work with my right hon. Friend the Member for

[Mrs Miller]

Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), when he was at the Ministry of Justice, on making sure that we have world-leading legislation in this area, and not only that but help and support for victims through the revenge pornography helpline. I welcome the new guidance that has been issued to schools on sexting. I also welcome the Digital Economy Bill, which, for the first time, starts to put in place laws that recognise that the online world is very different—that is, the laws about age verification for accessing pornography online.

However, we need to go further. I hope that the Law Commission is able to take forward its review of the law in this area. We need a clear legal liability on online media platforms to make sure that women are not abused online; a clear definition of “abuse”; a recognition of the drain on police resources that the current system creates; and perhaps a system of fines for the worst of these offenders. We should not be put off by the fact that this industry transcends international borders, but make sure that it is working for us in our country in the way we want it to work. I echo previous thoughts on the importance of having a proper code of practice, not just paying lip service, as it is at the moment, I am afraid.

The second area we need to focus on was mentioned by the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston in relation to the excellent report produced by the Women and Equalities Committee on sexual harassment. It is excellent because of the wonderful work of the Clerks, not because of the likes of me and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), as much as we try very hard. I thank the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston for giving that report yet more publicity. As she knows from having read it, two out of three young women regularly experience sexual harassment and violence in schools; that develops into a situation where, according to the National Union of Students, 68% of students experience verbal, physical and sexual harassment on campuses; and those students then go on into the outside world, where 85% of women experience unwanted sexual attention. It is a cumulative problem that we must deal with.

While there are many things that we can be doing, the most important is making sure that we give young people the kind of knowledge they need to be able to navigate the world better—the knowledge they would get from having compulsory sex and relationship education delivered at school. We must not continue to tackle only the symptoms of the problem of violence against women; we have to tackle the root causes as well. We would no longer tolerate the sort of behaviour that some of us may have had to experience in the workplace 30 years ago, yet we insist that young people keep quiet, do not speak out, and do not get the support they need when they experience such behaviour in schools.

There is a great deal of support for change. I have heard it from the Dispatch Box from my hon. Friend the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Women and Equalities and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities. I hope that in her response to the debate, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), will say that there is widespread support from Ministers across the board to

update the guidance and ensure that it is fit for purpose, and to make sure that we listen to the 90% of parents who want compulsory sex and relationship education, and want it now.

12.50 pm

**Michelle Thomson** (Edinburgh West) (Ind): I am going to relay an event that happened to me many years ago. I want to give a very personal perspective to help people, both in this place and outside, understand one element of sexual violence against women.

When I was 14, I was raped. As is common, it was by somebody who was known to me. He had offered to walk me home from a youth event. In those days, everybody walked everywhere—it was quite common. It was early evening. It was not dark. I was wearing—I am imagining and guessing—jeans and a sweatshirt. I knew my way around where I lived—I was very comfortable—and we went a slightly differently way, but I did not think anything of it. He told me that he wanted to show me something in a wooded area. At that point, I must admit that I was alarmed. I did have a warning bell, but I overrode that warning bell because I knew him and, therefore, there was a level of trust in place. To be honest, looking back at that point, I do not think I knew what rape was. It was not something that was talked about. My mother never talked to me about it, and I did not hear other girls or women talking about it.

It was mercifully quick and I remember first of all feeling surprise, then fear, then horror as I realised that I quite simply could not escape, because obviously he was stronger than me. There was no sense, even initially, of any sexual desire from him, which, looking back again, I suppose I find odd. My senses were absolutely numbed, and thinking about it now, 37 years later, I cannot remember hearing anything when I replay it in my mind. As a former professional musician who is very auditory, I find that quite telling. I now understand that your subconscious brain—not your conscious brain—decides on your behalf how you should respond: whether you take flight, whether you fight or whether you freeze. And I froze, I must be honest.

Afterwards I walked home alone. I was crying, I was cold and I was shivering. I now realise, of course, that that was the shock response. I did not tell my mother. I did not tell my father. I did not tell my friends. And I did not tell the police. I bottled it all up inside me. I hoped briefly—and appallingly—that I might be pregnant so that that would force a situation to help me control it. Of course, without support, the capacity and resources that I had within me to process it were very limited.

I was very ashamed. I was ashamed that I had “allowed this to happen to me”. I had a whole range of internal conversations: “I should have known. Why did I go that way? Why did I walk home with him? Why didn’t I understand the danger? I deserved it because I was too this, too that.” I felt that I was spoiled and impure, and I really felt revulsion towards myself.

Of course, I detached from the child that I had been up until then. Although in reality, at the age of 14, that was probably the start of my sexual awakening, at that time, remembering back, sex was “something that men did to women”, and perhaps this incident reinforced that early belief.

I briefly sought favour elsewhere and I now understand that even a brief period of hypersexuality is about trying to make sense of an incident and reframing the most intimate of acts. My oldest friends, with whom I am still friends, must have sensed a change in me, but because I never told them they did not know of the cause. I allowed myself to drift away from them for quite a few years. Indeed, I found myself taking time off school and staying at home on my own, listening to music and reading and so on.

I did have a boyfriend in the later years of school and he was very supportive when I told him about it, but I could not make sense of my response—and it is my response that gives weight to the event. I carried that guilt, anger, fear, sadness and bitterness for years.

When I got married 12 years later, I felt that I had a duty tell my husband. I wanted him to understand why there was this swaddled kernel of extreme emotion at the very heart of me, which I knew he could sense. But for many years I simply could not say the words without crying—I could not say the words. It was only in my mid-40s that I took some steps to go and get help.

It had a huge effect on me and it fundamentally—and fatally—undermined my self-esteem, my confidence and my sense of self-worth. Despite this, I am blessed in my life: I have been happily married for 25 years. But if this was the effect of one small, albeit significant, event in my life stage, how must it be for those women who are carrying it on a day-by-day basis?

I thought carefully about whether I should speak about this today, and it was people's intake of breath and the comment, "What? You're going to talk about this?", that motivated me to do it, because there is still a taboo about sharing this kind of information. Certainly for people of my generation, it is truly shocking to talk in public about this sort of thing.

As has been said, rape does not just affect the woman; it affects the family as well. Before my mother died early of cancer, I really wanted to tell her, but I could not bring myself to do it. I have a daughter and if something happened to her and she could not share it with me, I would be appalled. It was possibly cowardly, but it was an act of love that meant that I protected my mother.

As an adult, of course I now know that rape is not about sex at all—it is all about power and control, and it is a crime of violence. I still pick up on when the myths of rape are perpetuated from a male perspective: "Surely you could have fought him off. Did you scream loudly enough?" And the suggestion by some men that a woman is giving subtle hints or is making it up is outrageous. Those assumptions put the woman at the heart of cause, when she should be at the heart of effect. A rape happens when a man makes a decision to hurt someone he feels he can control. Rapes happen because of the rapist, not because of the victim.

We women in our society have to stand up for each other. We have to be courageous. We have to call things out and say where things are wrong. We have to support and nurture our sisters as we do with our sons. Like many women of my age, I have on occasion encountered other aggressive actions towards me, both in business and in politics. But one thing that I realise now is that I am not scared and he was. I am not scared. I am not a victim. I am a survivor.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for what she has said and the way in which she said it, which has left an indelible impression upon us all.

12.58 pm

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** It is an unbelievable thing to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson), who has just shared a horrific event from 37 years ago. As the mother of two daughters, I find it very hard to comprehend the impact of such an incident on a 14-year-old and the sense of shame and blame.

Thank you for calling me to speak in this very important debate, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on securing it. It gives us an opportunity to share our experiences. This House is at its best when it speaks to the nation.

It is incredibly concerning and depressing, and deeply distressing, that we are having a debate about violence against women, because there are so many different themes to discuss. One of my first points was going to be about rape being used as a disgusting weapon of war, and about the fear and, as we have heard, the actuality of it happening to our youngsters on our streets.

Last night, I hosted an event with colleagues from the all-party group for women in Parliament and the women and enterprise all-party group to help, support, inspire and link with women in our communities. A diverse group of women came to Parliament to talk about their backgrounds and their growing and thriving networks.

Sadly, we have to accept that, as we have heard, women and children who live with gender-based inequality and the daily threat of violence are robbed of basic life chances and opportunities. Whether we are talking about acts of institutional violence against women worldwide or domestic abuse, so much needs to be done to protect women from gender-based violence. It is astonishing and heartbreaking that one third of women report experiencing physical or sexual violence—and that is just the women who feel able to report it. More than two thirds of family-related homicides are of our women.

In my constituency work, I hear weekly in my surgeries from people who are, as I realise when I sit there and listen to them, living with coercive control. We now have a law against it, and I have spoken to the Home Secretary and the chief constable of Hampshire police about understanding that law and the opportunity it gives us to protect people who find themselves living with coercive control. Even as they are sitting in my office and going through what the law covers, people start to recognise that it describes their situation.

I encounter constituents who tell me how they have had to deal with domestic violence and interact with the police. They describe living in fear and feeling under threat, and they ask me to feed into debates such as this the actuality of their situation. I am shocked by the controlling and threatening behaviour that people experience in relation to family courts. It still surprises me that people do not feel safe in a place where they are reporting what has happened to them so that they can go on to have a better life, which they truly deserve.

I welcome the Government's work on a vital strategy to end violence against women, and their commitment to a transformation of service delivery and a long-term

[Mims Davies]

reduction in the terrible crimes that we are discussing. I am proud to have contributed to the work of the Women and Equalities Committee, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller)—she is not in her place at the moment—on the pure commitment and leadership she has shown to make the Committee effective, bold and vital to the work of the House. The strategy and the £80 million of associated funding that we have heard about will go some way towards fighting violence against women. I am especially pleased that, as we have heard, £20 million more will go towards supporting women's refuges and helping councils to provide further accommodation for those—often women—who are fleeing violent partners.

I want to touch on three key areas on which I feel I can contribute to this debate: human trafficking, stalking and the international effort to stop violence against women. Human trafficking is widely accepted to be a form of violence directed against women. The police and other authorities identified at least 3,266 people last year who were thought to have been victims of modern slavery. I suspect, as we must all do, that the real number—including those who go undetected—is much higher.

The Government are doing excellent work to increase the rate of detection and liberate modern slaves from their abusers. Victims of modern slavery are often women who have been sold a lie. They are forced, with threats of violence, into this country and into degrading and dangerous servitude. While we debate this motion in a palace beside the river, women in this city are being beaten, enslaved and forced into prostitution. No effort is too great, and we must leave no stone unturned in finding and punishing the gangs responsible for those hideous crimes.

I welcome the work that the first Independent Anti-slavery Commissioner, Kevin Hyland, is doing. I hope that his recent report will shine a light on the acts of these despicable criminal gangs, and that we will capture and bring to justice the gangs that exploit our women. The Department for International Development "Work in Freedom" programme has reached more than 200,000 people so far, and I am delighted that the Government are supporting DFID's aid budget.

Under section 111 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, the Government created two new stalking offences. The more serious of the two is the section 4A offence, which is defined as:

"Stalking involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress".

There, again, we see the recurring theme of women facing the threat of violence. The number of prosecutions has risen dramatically every year, from 91 in the first six months to more than 1,100 commenced in 2014-15. In December 2015, the Home Office published a consultation on the introduction of a stalking protection order for cases of "stranger stalking".

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) for his work and focus on that terrible crime, and I share with him personal experience of it from my former career. I was also affected by the confusion surrounding the Data Protection Act—the idea that it was safe for me not to know the identity of the person who was stalking me because of data protection concerns. It was a terrible personal experience.

The summary of the consultation responses was published yesterday. An astonishing 20% of respondents stressed that there was a lack of understanding of stalking among professionals, including the police, and, sadly, a continued failure to take it seriously. Interestingly, it appears that the consultation responses are broadly in favour of increasing the strength of the law in this area. I absolutely agree, and I am very pleased that the Government have announced that they will introduce a new civil stalking protection order. That is a good measure, which should go some way to strengthening the law.

Finally, I want to touch on the international effort. I congratulate the Secretary of State for International Development on her work in this area. We are contributing £8 million to the UN trust fund to end violence against women and £35 million to the programme to reduce female genital mutilation, and that money is having an effect. Earlier this year, I had the pleasure of going to the Women of the Year lunch, at which one attendee took me to one side and said that she applauded the Conservative party and our Government for tackling FGM. She said that our Prime Minister had led the way in this matter. She went on to say that we were the only party that realised that we had nothing in it for us, so we were able to go where others had not dared to tread.

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** My hon. Friend is so right about FGM. The issue has slightly gone off the burner in the last few months, and it must come back again. Does she agree that it is absolutely vital that we get proper prosecutions? Does she also agree on the importance of the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014, which is being implemented by the Government?

**Mims Davies:** I was very proud to sit at the Women of the Year lunch with some really diverse and fantastic ladies from around the country who had done a great deal of positive work in this area, and to know that people felt that we had gone into an area that had been left and ignored for a long time. I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend.

The UK's contribution to women's rights organisations is critical to ensure that there is an international and co-ordinated effort to deal with the crimes that we are discussing. The debate is part of that effort, and I am delighted to contribute to it. The UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is, as we have heard, held on 25 November, and the 16 days of vital activism highlight all the important issues. We have made the UK one of the leading voices in the world, and I am proud to support the Government in doing so.

Many statistics have been cited to describe the truly enormous amount of work that needs to be done. However, these are not just statistics; they are mothers, daughters, sisters, nieces, friends and colleagues. If we are truly to end violence against women and girls, we need to make sure that there is no part of the world, state or society where the abuse of women is allowed, and no lack of laws, laws left unused or inappropriate laws that mean such abuse is allowed. We need to crush the human trafficking gangs, and we need to strengthen our institutional resolve to fight violence in this country. More needs to be done so that no sister is left behind, or, even worse, ever feels that she is left so.

1.10 pm

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I was 20, and the worst thing that I could ever imagine happening to me was about to take place. I was going to be one of those very rare statistics of a woman who is attacked by a stranger, not by someone she knows. I was in my second year at university. The man had seen me walk past his car, and had waited ahead for me to turn the corner. As I came up against him, all those words of advice given to me by my mum—“Knee him where it hurts, then run like hell”—disappeared. I was frozen in fear. As he shoved me to the ground, trying to rape me, I fought back, but I was battered. It was only the community spirited Indian neighbour further down the road who saved me from something worse.

I count myself as one of the lucky ones. I had managed to memorise his car number plate, and he was caught an hour later. He went to court; not many do. He pleaded guilty; I did not have to go through the horrors of a trial. He was sentenced; I did not have to look over my shoulder, checking if he was following me. He was a stranger; I did not have to wake up in the same bed as him, or go to work with him as my boss. He did not use a broken bottle to hurt me. He was alone, not with a group of other men. It was only once, not several times.

The point to this story is that even though, on the scale of violence against women, I was lucky because justice was done, the following few years were hard. I got afraid walking alone, so I bought a bike. I got scared in the night, so I slept with a knife. I was easily startled, and cried at the drop of a hat. However, again, I was lucky. I did not have a job to keep down, children to care for or elderly relatives to see to. I could work my way through the impact of this violent assault at my own speed and in my own space.

A new investigation by Nata Duvvury recognises that violence against women is a global health emergency and that it can have an impact on the GDP of a country. After a woman experiences violence, as I did, the hours, days and weeks a community and family have to spend taking care of the affected woman have a quantifiable financial impact on her community through the loss of her unseen caring responsibilities and work contributions.

As I said at the beginning, there are all sorts of versions of violence against women—domestic abuse, sexual assault, child abuse, actual bodily harm, murder. Every assault is very different: some are one-offs, like mine, but for others, violence is a regular and painful part of the fabric of their lives. At least one in four women experience domestic violence in their lifetime. On average, a woman is assaulted 35 times before her first call to the police. The police receive one domestic violence call every minute in the UK. Just to reiterate, one woman, who has probably been hurt 35 times before having the courage to do so, rings the police every minute. Sadly, as we know, domestic violence can often end in the death of the woman. As my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) has pointed out, 936 women were killed by men in England and Wales during a six-year period, which is one every three days—I repeat, one every three days.

Statistically, violence against women is happening in large numbers, and it can be predicted in some instances. Polly Neate, the chief executive of Women's Aid, has said:

“The killing of women, especially when women are killed by an abusive partner or ex-partner, is often reported as an isolated incident.”

However, there is an abject failure to look at the patterns of behaviour. It is as though we accept that fatal male violence is an inevitability, not a conscious choice that a man has made to end a woman's life. These killings are not isolated incidents; too many follow a similar pattern of violence and are premeditated. Many are committed in similar settings, similar weapons are used and similar relationships exist between the perpetrators and victims.

We need joined-up thinking on this issue. We need to educate young men about consent and about respect for women. We need to empower women who are suffering domestic violence to leave, and offer them a safe place to go. We need to refuse to accept online abuse. I applaud the Minister's work on making stalking, either online or in person, a crime. We need to support the organisations that work with women and girls who have experienced violence, and give them the resources and time they need. We need to encourage women to speak out and get the help they need.

Victims of abuse do not fit any one stereotype. In my previous industry—it is famous for tales of the casting couch—65%, or nearly three quarters, of women media workers have experienced intimidation, threats and abuse. The International Federation of Journalists has said:

“Violence against women remains one of the most widespread and tolerated violations of human rights and its perpetrators continue to enjoy impunity while its victims face losing their job, having their careers ruined, being silenced or worst of all killed.”

It does not matter how famous people are or how big their public profile is. In fact, this week Lady Gaga admitted that she suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder after being raped at 19. The actress in “Last Tango in Paris”, Maria Schneider, has said that the infamous scene with the butter was not consensual and that it was an assault, but because it was in front of cameras, she had to suck it up as all in a day's work. Oprah Winfrey has been very open about being raped aged nine.

We know about those cases because the survivors are in the public eye, but what about the millions that suffer in silence? Are they just statistics in a newspaper—an awful inevitability—or are they someone's daughter, someone's mum and someone we should be doing everything we can to protect? In such a spirit, I urge the Government to stand up and take action by ratifying the Istanbul convention to prevent violence against women, protect the victims and prosecute the perpetrators.

1.17 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Violence against women and girls is an abomination. That may not require restatement, but I am enormously proud that this Parliament is today noting the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. If I may say so, I am also hugely proud to witness the most powerful, cogent, eloquent and articulate speeches made today, particularly by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson), the hon. Member for Batley

[Alex Chalk]

and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies). It is a matter of great pride that Members of this House have spoken so powerfully.

I want to say a few words about stalking, which my hon. Friend mentioned. So much progress has been made in this area in recent years and progress continues to be made, but one piece of the jigsaw needs to be inserted. Stalking is a horrible, violating crime that rips apart relationships, destroys careers and can cause lasting mental harm. All too often, it is the gateway to serious violence. In the words of the Home Secretary in her excellent article for *The Daily Telegraph* this week:

“Victims can be tormented for years”,

and left

“too afraid to leave the house.”

The point about stalking is that it is no respecter of fame or fortune. We have heard about the cases of Lily Allen, Keira Knightley and Shingai Shoniwa from the Noisettes, but ordinary men and women—particularly women—can also be targeted.

In her article, the Home Secretary referred to doctors being targeted by patients, and she may well have had my constituent Dr Ellie Aston in mind. I will not go through every last detail of the ordeal she suffered, but it went on for seven years. The patient turned up at her surgery over 100 times, and he posted foul items through the letter box. He followed her on patient visits, slashed her tyres and appeared at a children’s birthday party. In her case, the defendant served a short prison sentence. However, in a pattern that is not uncommon in this kind of case, having served his sentence, he restarted his campaign. She started to receive packages at her surgery and at her home in Cheltenham. One of the packages simply read, “Guess who’s back?” When he was arrested again, a search of his computer revealed that he had made the inquiry “How long after a person disappears are they assumed dead?” As Members might expect, the effect was profound. She was advised by police to change her name and job, and move address, and it was suggested that she should come off the General Medical Council register—but she is the victim in all this. She unsurprisingly developed post-traumatic stress disorder.

Given that context, I strongly welcome the Government’s response. First in 2012, they recognised stalking as an offence—that is excellent. Secondly, we have the new protection of victims of stalking through the stalker protection orders, which, if breached, can carry a jail sentence of up to five years. They are a really positive step. They enable the police to ask courts to impose restrictions, and can restrict access to the internet and require mental health treatment.

That is all excellent. But the orders have to be seen in their proper context. The truth is that all they are is orders. An order is in effect a requirement from someone in authority that a person should alter their behaviour. Important as that is, sadly those who perpetrate this kind of activity all too often show themselves unwilling or unable to observe boundaries or respect authority. They do not obey the quiet word from the neighbourhood police community support officer, the letter from the local police station, the formal harassment warning, the civil injunction and so on. Although the orders are

welcome, and in appropriate circumstances may serve to nip some obsessions in the bud, they are unlikely to assist where that obsession has become ingrained.

That is why I respectfully suggest that for those most serious cases, in which the victims’ lives are made a living hell and they live in constant fear, we need to give the courts the powers they need to protect victims. That means treating stalking as a serious crime, not a minor offence. The reality is that when a stalker pleads guilty to the most serious imaginable offence, which could, by the way, be a repeat offence, the maximum he—and it is usually a he—can end up serving is just 20 months. The judge in the case of my constituent said that he did not have the tools he needed. When he was passing sentence at Gloucester Crown court, his honour Judge Tabor QC said:

“I have no doubt at all that you are dangerous in the sense that you pose a significant risk to her”—

that is, the victim—

“in future in terms of causing her serious harm... I am frustrated that the maximum sentence... is five years. I would, if I could, give you longer.”

Therein lies the problem. In the most serious cases, only when the stalker is in custody can the victims feel free—free to rebuild shattered lives, careers, relationships, confidence and mental health. No one is suggesting, least of all me, that in all cases we should lock people up and throw away the key or that people should be denied mental health treatment—none of the above. But in those most serious cases, where we know stalking can be a gateway to serious violence, our absolute priority must be to protect victims, and that means a sentence that is commensurate with the gravity of the offence. In due course I will therefore be inviting the Government to extend the sentences for stalking. Only by doing so can we truly protect victims of this horrible crime.

1.22 pm

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I commend hon. Friends and colleagues for their incredibly powerful contributions. I congratulate the hon. Members for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) and for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) on supporting this Backbench Business debate. It is absolutely necessary that we have such an important debate on the Floor of the House. It is through contributions such as that of the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) and my friend from the Women and Equalities Committee, the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), that we are able to give a voice to these important matters.

The UN initiative of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women serves to remind us of some of the worst human rights abuses imaginable. Violence against women persists in systematic abuse across the globe. I echo the sentiment of the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston that women’s rights are human rights. Although large strides have been made in recent years, as we have already heard there is still a long way to go. More than 20 years after the UN General Assembly declaration on the elimination of

violence against women, one in three women still experiences physical or sexual violence, mostly from an intimate partner.

Violence against women encompasses wide ranges of abuse, including domestic violence, sexual violence, female genital mutilation, honour killings and trafficking. These are abhorrent acts, and we all have a part to play in their eradication. In the words of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon:

“Break the silence. When you witness violence against women and girls, do not sit back. Act.”

I ask the Government to follow that command and act. We are in the middle of the UNiTE campaign’s 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, which runs from 25 November to 10 December.

**Patrick Grady:** The 16 days are being marked by all kinds of activity across the country and indeed, increasingly, around the world. The Maryhill women’s centre in my constituency does incredible work supporting women from all walks of life, especially those who have been affected by gender-based violence, and is having a series of events. Does my hon. Friend welcome the centre’s activities and those going on across the country?

**Angela Crawley:** I welcome every single effort across the UK to eradicate violence and to raise awareness of this important subject,

This year’s UNiTE 16 days of action seek to raise funds to resource the services that do vital work each and every day to end violence against women and girls, in response to a major shortfall in resources and tightening budgets; the campaign is doing all it can to raise awareness. Frameworks such as the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which includes a specific target for ending violence against women, need adequate funding if they are to result in significant change. That new global development agenda was adopted and ratified by every UN member state this year. It aims to

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Big projects are taking place worldwide. For example, the non-governmental organisation Physicians for Human Rights is working in Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo with doctors, nurses, police, lawyers and judges to enhance access to justice for survivors of sexual violence, and UN Women is working in Ethiopia, Jordan and Myanmar to develop essential health and legal services for women subjected to violence. However, funding and support are also needed closer to home.

I take this opportunity to recognise the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) on the rape clause campaign, that of my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) on the white ribbon campaign, and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) over many years on gender-based violence. I invite all right hon. and hon. Members to support her private Member’s Bill next week seeking to prevent and combat violence against women and girls, and asking the Government to ratify the Istanbul convention. I remind all Members that article 1 of that convention states:

“The purposes of this Convention are to... prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence ...contribute to the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women”

and girls in law and in practice. I also take this opportunity to commend the work of Dr Marsha Scott of Scottish Women’s Aid and all the staff of Women’s Aid South Lanarkshire for their work each and every day.

Turning to the domestic sphere, it could be argued that the UK Government place survivors of violence at risk through the operation of the child maintenance service. The service operates on a basis whereby the parent caring for children is charged a 4% collection fee for using it, amounting to an additional tax on a parent who has suffered domestic violence. There is an alternative: the caring parent can avoid the child maintenance tax by giving their bank details to the other parent directly, in what is known as a family-based arrangement. I have heard from constituents who are survivors of domestic violence who are too frightened to establish a family-based arrangement because of the legitimate fear that their abuser will be able to access their personal details or, where they have moved to a place of safety through fear that their life is in danger, to locate them.

What must the Government do to resolve that? They must consider the fact that women who have fled situations of domestic violence in certain circumstance are often pushed into poverty through having to flee their abuser. They could remove the additional 4% tax; and they could also issue clear guidance on ways in which women can get the tax removed, and provide clarity on the evidence required to make sure they are eligible for this removal. This should not be an arduous process. I am sure the Government would seek to amend it to ensure that it did not create problems.

It is all very well for the Government to encourage parents who have separated amicably to set up their own arrangement for paying child support as a cost-saving exercise, but a maintenance tax on victims of domestic violence is not a feasible option for domestic abuse survivors. Child support payments are often relied on as a way to establish a safe and independent life for domestic abuse survivors and their children, so to charge them puts the lives of the survivors and their children at risk. I hope the Minister will seek to address this issue and make a real commitment to these women, who are trying to put their lives back together and give their children a safe and happy childhood.

In Scotland, we are committed to tackling domestic violence. It is the priority of the Scottish Government. I recognise that the Scottish Government’s commitment to tackling domestic violence through legislation and in law is far ahead of the rest of the UK, but I am sure that the UK Government will commit to following in the steps of the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government are bringing forward a Bill to create a specific offence of domestic abuse. This will cover not only physical abuse but forms of psychological and coercive controlling behaviour that cannot easily be prosecuted under existing criminal law. This law will of course cover male and female perpetrators although, as the figures show, women are more often the victims of violence and they will benefit most from this protection in law. It will not only act as a deterrent, but make it clear that these sorts of behaviours are socially unacceptable.

The Government have a chance to make a statement and commit to ratifying the Istanbul convention, either today or next week by supporting the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan. The Government have taken an approach to child maintenance

[Angela Crawley]

which is ethically dubious and practically dangerous, and it must be addressed. Systematic violence in relationships must be tackled appropriately, and we must address the serious issue with the child maintenance service and survivors of domestic violence.

Every little girl deserves to grow up feeling safe and free from online abuse, stalking, violence, rape, sexual assault or the fear of being killed. These are criminal offences. Every little girl deserves to grow up feeling safe.

1.32 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I first want to pay a massive tribute to Members who have told their own personal stories today. For so many people, the victims of domestic and sexual violence look like somebody else—they look like the “other” when in fact they are all of us, and it is incredibly powerful to show that. In fact, they are everybody. They are living on our streets. We are sitting next to them at work. We are talking to them on the school run. They are everywhere. I pay a huge tribute to those who have done that today. The memorable women in here will certainly resonate with people out there.

Last week, I dealt with a very upset mother on the phone. Her daughter had, while at school, had to deal with two boys in a dinner queue throwing insults at each other about how they had had sex with her. These children were nine years old. When the mother spoke to her daughter about the incident, the little girl said she felt ashamed. She thought she had done something wrong and that was why the boys were saying this about her. And so begins the life of another young girl who thinks she is to blame for the misogyny she faces, and will probably face for the rest of her life.

That is the example I heard last week. During the inquiry into sexual harassment in schools undertaken by the Women and Equalities Committee, we heard a huge amount of similar evidence. It felt like lifting up a huge rock on a problem that has existed for too long, and is holding back both young girls and young boys. In my time working with local schools in partnership with Women’s Aid, I heard hundreds of stories of girls who were harassed, assaulted, raped and sexually exploited—all before they were 16. I would hazard a guess—I think the debate has shown this—that every woman in this building has a tale to tell about being a teenager and having boys or men groping them, trying to lift up their skirts, talking about have sex with them and scaring them.

When I told my 11-year-old son, who has just started secondary school, about what had happened to the little girl, he shrugged and said, “I hear that stuff all the time, mom.” When I look at the Government’s response to the Select Committee’s report, I am left exasperated. As a parent, I am worried. Should I sit with my son and the little girl in question and say, “Don’t worry, there is cross-Government support for prioritising work to make significant progress in this area”? I am sure their shame will not be at all reduced.

Just after I was elected, I went to speak at a conference in Birmingham on tackling violence against women and girls—I am sure that’s a surprise to everyone! The room was filled with police officers, children’s social workers,

housing managers, doctors, nurses, teachers and charities—all specialists in their field. I asked them to raise their hands if they thought that the single biggest change in the prevention of violence and abuse of young women was to make sex and relationship and consent education mandatory in our schools. Every single person raised their hand.

Year after year, this House has been given a chance to pass this much needed law. Obviously, the Government were a little ahead of their time in refusing to listen to the experts, because every time the proposal has been before the House, this House has failed to pass it. I want to know why. I want the Minister, who I know cares deeply about this, to put down the red folders, throw away her notes, throw caution to the wind—I’ve made a career out of it—and tell me honestly why this is. In the days of David Cameron, we were always led to believe, by whispers, that someone at No. 10 was stopping it. We in the preventing violence against women and girls sector were constantly assured by people in the Home Office that the then Home Secretary agreed with us. Well, she is in No. 10 now, and still some sort of conservatism with a small “c” stands in the way of what over 90% of parents want for their children and what 100% of experts know would make the difference.

I do not want to hear “We are looking into this”, “We support the calls” and “We are taking firm action.” I do not want to be pointed to another strategy document that proves nothing more than our ability to write strategy documents. I have been hearing it for years, and now I want a real answer as to why this law has not been passed. I know it has support across this House and in every party. We must act and start having open conversations with our children about gendered attitudes that lead to the harassment of girls and young women, and the demonisation of boys and young men.

**Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very powerful speech and of course I agree with every word. Like her, before becoming an MP I spent my life in the domestic and sexual violence world. Does she agree that we really need proper, high-quality and well integrated perpetrator programmes, as well as sex and relationships education? The one does prevention and the other tries to make things better when things do not work out, but they must be of a high standard. Will she join me in calling for the Istanbul convention to be ratified by this country, and for all Members to be in the House a week tomorrow to do that?

**Jess Phillips:** I thank my hon. Friend and of course I agree with every word. It is very important to stress that the Select Committee heard amazing evidence from some brilliant organisations working specifically with men and boys in this space. They showed how much could be done. If we do not focus on the attitudes of men who commit violence, and on boys who will become those men who commit violence, we will be letting the side down. I stress that I have seen bad practice in this space of work with perpetrators. Local commissioning must be done by experts in the field, and the organisation my hon. Friend worked for is exactly that.

We are here to speak about the elimination of violence, not cleaning up afterwards. Every year, I stand and read the names of women murdered at the hands of violent

men. It is only through prevention and culture change that each and every year that list will grow shorter. Ministers have the power to reduce that list, and I will sing their praises if they do. Talking to our children about consent, gendered attitudes and respect is the very best place to start.

1.40 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am honoured to follow the powerful speech from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who clearly has much experience in this area. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting a debate on what everyone agrees is a very important subject—one once regarded as taboo, as was referred to, so powerfully, by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). Hers was a deeply moving speech that I think will help to move this cause forward. I really do applaud her.

The fact that we are holding this debate shows how the taboo is being broken. Is it not great that we can discuss these things? With the lead of a Prime Minister utterly committed to change in this area, and with the cross-party consensus, further progress can be made. As we have heard so eloquently today, violence against women and girls has a devastating impact, not only on the lives of the victims, but on their families and all those close to them. It has enormous knock-on effects also on the criminal justice system and the health service and puts a strain on local authorities and police services, all of which have to deal with these issues on the ground. Avon and Somerset police service reports that it is one of the fastest growing categories of crime.

Local charities and organisations that support women and girls who have been victims of violence do much excellent work, and I want to commend some such charities in my constituency. Taunton Women's Aid does excellent work with the local community by offering practical support in its drop-in sessions—for women and men. It also works closely with other charities, such as Mind, to develop school workshops—many colleagues have referred to the importance of education—where people can talk about domestic abuse and mental health issues.

Another fine Taunton-based charity working in this area is Stand Against Violence, which runs school workshops focusing on personal safety, anger and aggression, basic life support and the awareness of choices and their consequences. I know the gentleman who runs the organisation. He set it up because when only a teenager his brother was tragically set upon and murdered by a group of young people. Out of that aggressive and unacceptable action has come a charity that goes into schools to talk about how we cannot live like that. It is important that we get across these messages, particularly to the opposite sex, about controlling abuse and aggression, and that is exactly what Stand Against Violence does.

Complementing the work of those charities, Taunton Deane Borough Council and Somerset County Council are offering services to support women who have been victims of violence. Some housing associations are also doing excellent work. Knightstone housing association, which operates across the south-west, runs a domestic abuse service, which it started in 2015, offering a 24/7 helpline and providing emergency accommodation

across the country. It is a particularly good model, run in conjunction with Somerset County Council, and is moving us towards a much more comprehensive and integrated service as part of Somerset's groundbreaking integrated domestic abuse service. It is the kind of model that we should be encouraging others to follow.

I am pleased that this excellent local work is being backed up by the commitment from the Government and their provision of a sound framework upon which to stimulate the necessary shift in attitudes that many colleagues have mentioned. Violence against women and girls is everybody's business, not just that of charities and worthy Members of Parliament. If we can get that message through to adults and children, we will make a real difference.

The violence against women and girls strategy, published in March 2016, has been allocated £80 million and is bringing together the significant advances in legislation that colleagues have mentioned, including the specific offences relating to stalking. I welcome the new stalking civil protection order and the coercive and controlling behaviour legislation. As a great "Archers" fan, I also think that its storyline has helped to raise awareness. I personally was not really aware of it. It was utterly shocking and really brought it to the fore. There is also the legislation on failing to protect women and girls from female genital mutilation and revenge pornography. The strategy recognises, however, that there are still many challenges ahead and that all too often these crimes remain hidden. If we are truly to tackle them, we must bring those crimes out of the shadows. With 1.3 million women a year still experiencing domestic abuse and 400,000 sexual assaults in the last year, there is still much to do.

I welcome the Government's continued four-pronged approach, bringing together prevention, the provision of services, partnership and the pursuing of perpetrators. This approach, which is definitely the way forward, has been in place since 2010 and is starting to work. Although I have just given some shocking statistics, the crime survey in England and Wales shows that the number of women who experienced domestic abuse in the past year is the lowest since the survey began, which is welcome news, and that prosecutions and convictions are up, so perhaps we are moving in the right direction.

I want to give a special mention to the £15 million to launch the Government's three-year violence against women and girls service transformation fund, the purpose of which is to aid and facilitate best practice—perhaps the programme I mentioned earlier is an example of best practice. That is on top of the £20 million available for accommodation-based services announced by the Department for Communities and Local Government. The transformation fund is open to commissioners working in partnership with specialist groups, police and crime commissioners, local authorities and health groups, and I would encourage all those groups to get together, to form working groups—perhaps Members could run roundtables and get people together—and to formulate bids, because the money is there for people to take advantage of, and I welcome it.

I welcome the lead that the Government, particularly our Prime Minister, are taking on this very serious issue, but there is a lot more to do, and it is essential that we all work together to banish the prospect of any

[Rebecca Pow]

woman having to live in fear of violence. As a mother of two daughters, I believe that every girl should grow up knowing she is safe.

1.48 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for bringing this debate to the House and for speaking so powerfully. We have heard some brilliant speeches, but I want to commend in particular the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spennings (Tracy Brabin) for so bravely sharing their personal experiences. We all listened and learned a lot. I hope that their speeches have a wider impact.

I want to touch on some international issues. A couple of months ago, I had the privilege of visiting Sierra Leone. It was humbling to see this country struggling to recover from the effects of an Ebola epidemic that took 11,000 lives there. In the midst of the chaos of this horrendous epidemic, Sierra Leone decided to ban the procedure of female genital mutilation. However, Sierra Leone was declared Ebola-free in March this year, and the ban on FGM has sadly now been lifted. Women in Sierra Leone are being repressed by FGM. It is an ancient practice in Sierra Leonean culture, cultivating a heritage of fear among young women. It is reported by the World Health Organisation that 88% of Sierra Leonean girls have been “cut”, to use the commonly used description of this dreadful practice.

Globally, 200 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation. Culturally, the procedure is alleged to protect communities against wayward and evil spirits, and it is seen as the final passage from adolescence to womanhood. In reality, it is imposed on girls by a matriarchal society, forcing the younger members of the community to join their faction and structure of society, which in turn controls women—and it becomes a vicious circle in which the “tradition” of FGM, if I may refer to it in that way, is passed on to the next generation.

While I was in Sierra Leone, we visited the country’s Parliament and spoke with its MPs who were at the time considering a law to ban FGM below the age of 18 and to introduce a requirement for “consent” to be given. In reality, it would be difficult to prove that consent had been given, especially in the isolated villages and townships outside of the capital Freetown, but it must be welcomed as a very small step in the right direction. There is an enormously long way to go before this vile practice is banned outright and internationally.

**Angela Crawley:** Does the hon. Lady accept that here in the UK, young girls, during what is known as “cutting season”, are taken to their home countries for FGM and then returned to the UK, and that that practice must also be stopped?

**Liz McInnes:** I thank the hon. Lady for that important intervention. Yes, sadly, I am all too well aware of that practice. I am sure that she has constituents raising that issue with her. I, too, have been contacted by church groups about families that they are trying to protect.

Moving on, even when the legislative process finally enshrines protection against violence towards women, the journey will not have ended; legislation is just the beginning. Afghanistan epitomises that struggle. In 2009, women’s rights activists successfully fought and campaigned to implement an executive order of the Elimination of Violence Against Women Bill, which put into the constitution the fundamental right to protect its female citizens. Since then, however, the situation has systematically deteriorated.

In 2013, Special Representative Jan Kubis of the UN Secretary-General in Afghanistan told the UN Security Council:

“The majority of women killed is linked to domestic violence, tradition, culture of the country, but women activists have been deliberately targeted.”

Since the continued withdrawal of British and US troops, the situation has escalated. Amnesty International reported this year:

“It has been increasingly dangerous over recent years to be a woman in public life in Afghanistan, and there has been a growing body count of women who have been brave enough to ignore the risks. With the withdrawal of international forces and the deterioration we are seeing in women’s rights, there is every reason to fear that these dangers will become even worse in the years ahead.”

Nearly seven years on, Afghan women are still under serious threat and violence is on the rise. In the first eight months of 2016, the Afghan Attorney General’s Office received 3,700 cases of violence against women, with 5,000 cases recorded in 2015.

As well as deep-rooted historical, religious or cultural diktats, newly formed technological changes have had detrimental effects on women. Women cannot only be victimised in civil society; it has seeped into the virtual sphere. As many colleagues have mentioned, the internet and, in particular, social media have fuelled gender violence. Even here in the European Union, one in 10 women and teenage girls reports having experienced cyber-harassment. This includes threats of rape and unsolicited sexually explicit images.

In Bangladesh, a group of bloggers were targeted by a militant group because of their posts supporting religious freedoms and the promotion of women’s rights. All 84 of the group were put on a hit list. One prominent blogger, Shammi Haque, had to leave the country and her family because of the threats on her life. A member of a militant organisation put a bounty on her head. She was granted asylum in Germany earlier this year, but even after escaping to Germany, Shammi was still at risk. A political leader in Bangladesh began collecting money through a crowdfunding platform to pay for a ticket to Germany so that someone could be

“sent over to rape her”.

Many of us in this House have received threats online, but it did not mean fleeing our country, our home and our families. Yet the online tone in the UK is becoming more and more vitriolic and threatening towards women. Only this week, the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) was subjected to an abhorrent online threat, leading to a man being arrested, while earlier this year my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) had to have her house locks changed in similar circumstances. Again, just this week, a man has been arrested after online threats against Gina Miller, the woman who launched a legal challenge

against the Brexit process. Also this week, a 24-year-old man was found guilty of racially aggravated harassment of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger).

The statistics and stories we have heard this afternoon are shocking, disturbing and fundamentally unjust. As an elected female Member of Parliament, I am fortunate to have a platform where I can speak not for myself, but for those without a voice, for those women and girls who are forced to live in silence, who are not treated with dignity and who do not have the right to equality. I hope that this debate will lead to further conversations and further progression on eliminating violence against women and girls.

1.57 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak on this issue. Let me first congratulate right hon. and hon. Members who put their names to this debate on bringing it forward so that we can all participate. I thank them very much for that. There have been some excellent speeches, but I would single out in particular the contribution of the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). I doubt whether any Member in their place today could have failed to be moved by her story. I thank her greatly for giving us the opportunity to hear such a personal story put across so well.

I recently attended an event on this issue at Westminster, and I was again shocked by the research carried out for that debate. It is beyond me how in this day and age there are still some people out there who believe that it is permissible or even forgivable to physically harm anyone—never mind women and children. This issue is close to my heart, and I am my party's spokesperson on women and equalities, among many other issues. I am very happy to contribute to this debate and to support the thesis, focus and central thrust of what the debate is all about.

I note that the debate coincides with the 16 days of action against domestic violence campaign, which has been highlighted on social media to great effect. We are right in the midst of these days of action, which span 25 November to 10 December—and what better place for us to play our part in taking action against domestic violence than in this place where laws are made in the greatest seat of democracy in the world, setting an example to many other democratic societies.

In my own Strangford constituency, Women's Aid has done a wonderful job in highlighting this campaign, and I am aware that it is aimed at businesses to support them in taking action against domestic abuse and violence. Employers have a legal obligation to assess dynamic risk and to support the health, safety and wellness of their employees. Sometimes it is good for business to focus on that and discharge the responsibility to employees. Companies can do more to aid their employees who endure domestic violence by training those who witness it and by protecting staff as a whole, with the goal of securing safety and mitigating financial loss.

Most small businesses without a human resources department will panic at the very thought of this, so we now have the perfect opportunity to educate people in how to help those who are caught in situations in which they cannot help themselves. I know that this is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but perhaps she will give

us some idea of what could be done to give small and medium-sized businesses the capacity and, perhaps, the resources to ensure that education programmes are carried out effectively in the workplace.

The idea of the campaign is that a different theme will be identified each day to explore the various forms of domestic violence, so that those in the workplace are better equipped to acknowledge signs that it may be taking place. My mum always told me "Never air your dirty laundry", and she was absolutely right, because we should not do that in our families or in our parties; we should keep it at home. However, it is also true that there is a mentality that often prevents people from seeking the help that they need. As the statistics make clear, domestic violence does not consist of just a few isolated events. It is an epidemic, and it must be addressed. That is why this debate is so important, and why I am so pleased to be taking part in it.

We tend to reel off statistics, but they are important, because they show what is happening in society. I want to cite, in a little more detail, some statistics that may have already been mentioned. Two women are killed every week in England and Wales by a current or former partner. As we heard from the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra), one woman is killed every three days. One in four women in England and Wales will experience domestic violence in their lifetime, and 8% will suffer domestic violence in any given year. Globally, one in three women will experience violence at the hands of a male partner. Domestic violence has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime.

Every minute police in the United Kingdom receive a domestic assistance call, but only 35% of domestic violence incidents are reported to the police. We need to do something about that, but I am not sure what should be done. Is it a case of raising awareness, or a case of ensuring that when people go to the police, they receive the response that they need?

The 2001-02 British Crime Survey found that there were an estimated 635,000 incidents of domestic violence in England and Wales during that period; 81% of the victims were women and 19% were men. Nearly 22% of all violent incidents reported by participants in the BCS were incidents of domestic violence. That is a massive proportion. On average—this statistic worried me particularly—a woman is assaulted 35 times before her first call to the police: only then does the lady have the courage to report those assaults. We must encourage women to go to the police at an early stage, so that we do not end up with the horrific stories that we are hearing. Other Members have told such stories today, and I want to make it clear that I understand the issues.

Like others, I welcome the news of a legislative change to deal with stalking, and I thank the Government for what they are doing. Let us give credit where it is due. I understand that the new legislation will enable the problem to be dealt with at an early stage, so that rather than someone being stalked two or three times and then complaining to the police, the stalking will be stopped at the outset. That is certainly a step in the right direction. I have attended some meetings in the House to discuss the issue, and I am aware of the great fear and threat that people feel when they are stalked, almost as prey, by people who do not seem to care what happens to them. We need a strong law to deal with that.

[*Jim Shannon*]

In 2014-15, the 24 Hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Helpline, which is open to anyone who is affected by domestic violence, managed 27,923 calls. Most calls to the service continue to be from women—and that is what this debate is about. There were 611 sexual violence calls to the helpline, from 518 female callers and 93 male callers, and 58% of women callers disclosed mental health issues as a result of that violence. The effect on family members moves me greatly. I find, as an elected representative, that constituents have heart-rending stories to tell that move me to tears, and I am sure that other Members have had the same experience.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has referred to the mental health effects of violence against women. It concerns me that women in my constituency who have been victims of rape cannot gain access to the counselling and support services that they require. There is nothing in Slough, so they have to go to Wycombe or Reading. Moreover, the waiting list means that women who experience this devastation must wait for up to 20 months. I urge the Minister to promise Government investment to deal with that horrible delay.

**Jim Shannon:** I know that the right hon. Lady takes a very compassionate approach to this subject. We should all consider her wise words, and I hope that the Minister and the Government will respond to them positively.

In 2014-15, 533 women—an increase of 79 on the previous year—and 226 children were referred to Women's Aid refuges. Yesterday, in Westminster Hall, we had a debate on South Sudan, and some of the statistics that we heard were equally horrendous. Some 70% of women in certain parts of the area have been subjected to sexual violence in either a minor or an extensive form. Abuse is almost inherent in some societies throughout the world. Given that this is International Women's Day, let us speak not just for our women at home in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but for women throughout the world, as the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston and others have already done.

I have been privileged to meet a lady called Michelle Akintoye, the chief executive officer of Britafrica. On 22 November, an event was held in the House involving a panel of speakers and people who had been sent invitations. The purpose of the event was to celebrate universal children's day and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Members of the police were present, and solicitors and people involved in matrimonial and family law were on the panel. There was a very good crowd there, asking questions, and many of the questions concerned violence at home, in this great city of London. That gives us an idea of the magnitude of what has taken place.

I hate the fact that 25% of women—one in four—will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. That statistic should be in a history book rather than in an article in today's paper, or tomorrow's paper, or Sunday's paper. The question is, what are we in the House doing to play our part, not simply during these 16 days of action, but in the lifetime of this Parliament? What education are we providing to raise a generation who will abhor this violence, and who will know that there is

no shame in seeking help? We need to encourage women to respond, and to have access to centres throughout the United Kingdom—in Slough and elsewhere—which they can contact whenever they need them. That generation will know that they are worth too much to have to put up with emotional and physical abuse. Let me ask the Minister this: how are we training our young men to value women, and our young women to value themselves? It is our duty to answer those questions today, and if we do not have the right answers, we have a duty to get them right.

I thank the Members who initiated this debate. Let me end by issuing a challenge to every Member who has spoken today, and to those who have not been able to attend the debate. How can we make changes here that will make changes in the quality of life for people in every age group and of every colour, creed and class throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland? That is our challenge, and we must be determined to meet it.

2.8 pm

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): Today's debate marks the UN International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. "Elimination" is an ambitious word, but what we have heard today makes it very clear that we need to be ambitious and determined if we are to tackle the epidemic of violence against women that is blighting so many lives.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) on leading the debate so comprehensively, and commend the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for the ongoing work of her Committee to promote and advance progress in this area.

We have heard from many speakers the recognition that violence against women is a global human rights abuse, but it is a pervasive and systemic human rights abuse and it affects women in all our communities and all over our world. It is rooted in, and compounded by, gender inequality; Scottish Women's Aid is fond of saying it is a cause and a consequence of violence against women.

We have heard today that one in three women will experience domestic abuse or sexual violence in their lifetime, but that is probably a conservative estimate. I want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson) for her enormous courage in talking openly about things that have been so unspeakable for so long. Breaking the silence—as she and other Members today, including the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), have done—is incredibly powerful. I hope their frankness, wisdom and strength will help other women—women who are recovering from sexual violence, women who at the moment do not know whether their lives will get back on track or ever be the same again. I hope what we have heard today helps women to go forward with strength, and makes the future different for the next generation of women.

Members have made reference today to the fact that this morning I published my private Member's Bill that would require the Government to set out a timetable to ratify the Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, better known as the Istanbul convention.

It would also strengthen reporting requirements so that MPs would have better opportunities to scrutinise the implementation of the convention on an ongoing basis. I hope the Government will support my Bill and that Members will come to the debate a week on Friday, and push forward something all of us want to see happen.

The Istanbul convention has local, national and transnational dimensions and its implementation has the potential to make a real difference to women's lives. Scottish Women Aid has described the Istanbul convention as

“quite simply the best piece of international policy and practice for eliminating violence against women that exists, setting minimum standards for Government responses to victims and survivors of gender based violence...It is a blueprint for how we move from small change at the margins, services that are picking up too few people, too late, to a system that is designed to end domestic abuse and violence against women.”

The Istanbul convention offers a powerful vehicle for countries across Europe, and beyond, to prevent and combat violence against women. The UK has played a prominent role for many years in responding to the challenge, and was involved in the development of the convention and the negotiations surrounding it. However, although the UK signed the Istanbul convention back in June 2012, it is still to ratify the treaty. The Government have consistently said that they want to ratify and intend to do so, but we have reached a hiatus. The process has stalled and the Istanbul convention has now been languishing on the backburner for over four and a half years. My Bill is an attempt to shift the logjam and give the Government the impetus they need to take the final steps to bring the UK into compliance.

There are a number of areas in which the UK Government need to legislate to bring domestic legislation into compliance with article 44 of the treaty, and there is the need for legislative change or legislative consent in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but I hope the Government will use the opportunity of my private Member's Bill to shift this logjam and ratify the convention while they have the opportunity to do so.

I want to join other Members in paying tribute to the IcChange campaign for its work. I have also been very grateful for the support from Members on both sides of this House and from every part of the UK for that process. Given all the comments today from Members—not least the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) saying, “Come on, we can do this; let's just do it”—I hope we are now on a fast track to making this a reality.

I have been working with women's organisations from across the UK in connection with my Bill. I was invited by Solace Women's Aid to visit one of its refuges here in London, which I did yesterday. I met five women and eight children currently staying in the refuge and the staff who support them. There were many things to reflect on from my visit, including overwhelmingly how vulnerable some women are when they leave an abusive situation and how precarious their lives can be for some time afterwards.

My visit brought it home to me that the problems associated with the shortage of affordable housing—which is of course very acute in London, but is also a reality in all parts of the UK—are magnified and compounded for women trying to move on from refuge accommodation and make a fresh start. Women who have left home with

their children in what they stand up in have a really hard road ahead. For their own safety, they often need to leave their own community, moving away from any support networks they have.

I met a wee boy in the refuge yesterday. He was nine years old and he bears the physical scars of his father's violence; I do not think it is possible to know what invisible scars he may carry. However, he wanted to show me his Lego. He had built an aeroplane, which he was very pleased to tell me he had designed himself, but his masterpiece, which he was showing off with pride, was a house—a house made out of Lego. At present, his family is all sleeping in one room in a refuge, but he dreams of a home some day. Yet his mum told me how hard it was to find a house for her and her children, when she is still looking after a toddler and does not have a job. She also talked about experiencing racism in her search for housing and more generally, and this focused my mind on the fact that domestic violence is one of the major causes of homelessness right across the UK. In Scotland, domestic violence is the third most common reason for a homelessness application. Some 73% of applications are made by women, and more than a third of those are women with children.

This does make me wonder, too, how many women might stay in violent and dangerous situations because they have nowhere else to go and fear the consequences of uprooting their families, unsettling their children and taking them out of school. Women who do leave their home to escape violence find that they may have to move repeatedly before finding a stable home, with all the upheaval that entails, and there is no doubt in my mind that that inhibits women from seeking safety for themselves and their children.

Gender-based violence affects women of all social and economic backgrounds, all ages, all ethnicities and all religions, but we know that some women are at greater risk: poorer women, younger women, disabled women, and women from minorities. In this respect, we see gender inequality compounded by other forms of structural disadvantage, and I saw that at first hand yesterday.

Several Members have talked about the cultural and traditional aspects of violence against women. I have talked a lot about the Istanbul convention today and in recent weeks and it is a very powerful legal instrument, but it is also important to remember that we have work to do to bring about changes in attitudes and beliefs. The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston touched on this, as did the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) when she was highlighting traditional practices such as FGM at home and abroad.

I attended an inter-faith event held along the Corridor in the House of Lords earlier this week. Representatives of many of the major religions in the UK attended. It is important that we bring those dimensions into the debate, because culture is often held up as a justification for certain forms of gender-based violence, but cultures can, and do, change, and religious leaders have a special responsibility and opportunity to influence deep-seated attitudes, values and beliefs that are often foundational to people's identities and the lives they go on to lead. So I was encouraged by meeting those people from several faith traditions who are taking these issues very seriously and working within their own faith communities to move things forward.

[Dr Eilidh Whiteford]

One of the things the women in the refuge said to me yesterday was that women need to help women. It is clear from looking around at the gender balance of those in the Chamber today that women take these issues very seriously. Our bodies are on the frontline; our psychological health and our very selves are often on the frontline in this battle. All of us are affected by gender-based violence, and some of us are affected in very personal ways, as we have heard today. Far too many of us continue to experience one form or another of gender-based violence.

Sexual violence is grounded in the abuse of power, yet each and every one of us in this place is incredibly powerful: we are women with a voice; we are women with a platform; we are people entrusted to speak on behalf of others. Surely our greatest testament would be for us to use that power to eradicate violence against women. I hope women right across this House—and men, too, who want to stand in solidarity with us—will join us in a fight to make these statements not just words, so that when we talk about the elimination of violence against women, we mean it, and we end it once and for all.

2.19 pm

**Sarah Champion** (Rotherham) (Lab): I should like to start by congratulating the right hon. and hon. Members who secured this Back-Bench debate. It has been a phenomenal debate, and I want to echo the message from my hon. Friend the Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) that this is a cross-party issue and that we can eliminate violence against women only if we work collaboratively. What we have heard in the Chamber today has shown that that is indeed a possibility, given the conviction that we all have on this issue. My hon. Friend went on to contextualise why the debate is so important, with 3 million women a year in the UK experiencing violence. That is 27.1% of us, or almost a third. I echo the comments from other Members that that is probably an underestimate. She also rightly focused on the impact of violence against women and the ripples of horror that go out from it. She focused particularly on the impact on children and the lack of support for them, as well as the impact on the whole community. She also spoke about the lack of mental health care for those affected. My right hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) also spoke about that.

The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) and my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) spoke powerfully about the horrifying increase in online abuse and gave clear recommendations on what needs to be done. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke also spoke about the sexual harassment of girls, and I would like to acknowledge that the work done on this by the Women and Equalities Committee has been fantastic. I hope that we get an equally strong response on this from the Government.

I am pausing before saying this, because I do not think that anyone in the Chamber will forget the speech made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). She spoke of “feeling surprise, then fear, then horror”. Those words described her feelings as a 14-year-old girl. We all felt that horror, and we are all sorry for her and for every other girl who experiences it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) spoke of the shame that we should feel for allowing this to happen. She urged the Government, as so many have, to introduce proper mandatory sex and relationships education so that all children can understand that no means no, understand how to respect themselves and others and understand the difference between right and wrong.

I want to pick up on one word that my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) used repeatedly in her speech. That word was “lucky”. She said she was lucky because she was only violently assaulted by a man. When we look at the scale of abuse, at the number of murders, which she also mentioned, and at the number of times a woman will endure domestic abuse before she reports it, perhaps she was lucky. I feel lucky that she is here in this Chamber to share her story with us and to campaign to prevent that from happening to other women.

I was pleased that the hon. Members for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) picked up on how victims were often the ones who had to change their lives, move house or change their name as a result of violence. Why do the victims of this crime, and this crime alone, have to suffer this perpetual assault and live in fear, possibly for the rest of their lives? We have to do something to address that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton broadened the subject to an international level and spoke powerfully about the fact that 88% of women in Sierra Leone have been mutilated through female genital mutilation. I agree with her point that as long as this is viewed as a cultural practice rather than child abuse and a gross violation of children, we will never eradicate it. We in this Chamber need to do all we can to stop using that cultural excuse. We need to attack it because it is child abuse. She also told the House how dangerous it is to be a woman in Afghanistan, particularly in public life. The horrors in Afghanistan are unparalleled, but we are seeing a ripple effect across the world at the moment. That is something that we all need to call out very actively.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made an interesting speech about working with companies to help them to recognise the signs of domestic violence and to help them to intervene to prevent it. He also mentioned the international aspect of the problem, telling us that one in three women suffered violence and that one in four women suffered domestic violence in the UK. He gave us in the Chamber a duty to challenge and address that issue.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) talked about her Bill, which will be debated in the Chamber next Friday, and I hope that we will all support it. It demands that the Government produce a timetable for ratifying the Istanbul convention. That convention is a historic international treaty that sets legally binding standards for preventing and tackling domestic abuse. Crucially, the convention gives all survivors of domestic abuse the right to access the specialist services they need to enable them to live in safety and rebuild their lives. I hope I am not being uncharitable in wondering whether that is the block that is preventing the Government from signing the convention. I hope that they will do the right thing next Friday and give a guaranteed timetable for the ratification of the convention.

The Government should, however, be commended for doing a lot of work to prevent violence against women and girls, and I am grateful to the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) for drawing that work to the attention of the House. A lot of work has been done on modern slavery, and a stalking Bill has been introduced. Similarly, national and international work has been done on preventing violence against women and girls and on preventing FGM.

However, we know that domestic violence and violence against women and girls remain at pandemic levels the world over. Levels of domestic violence and violence against women in the UK have increased rapidly between 2009 and 2014, pushing up the overall levels of violent crime in the UK. Yes, a number of Members mentioned the contradictory official view that the Office for National Statistics crime statistics suggest that violent crime in England and Wales is continuing to fall, but we know from research carried out by Professor Sylvia Walby that that is because the ONS caps the number of crimes committed against an individual at five incidents per victim, even when many more offences have been recorded. When the cap is removed and the raw data are examined, the number of violent crimes increases by 60%. That increase is predominantly concentrated in violent crimes against women perpetrated by their partners and acquaintances.

As my hon. Friends have stated today, domestic violence has a higher rate of repeat victimisation than any other crime. On average, a woman will endure 35 attacks before calling the police. So, looking at the ONS data, we can deduce that 30 of those attacks will go unrecorded. I am grateful that the ONS has now agreed to stop that arbitrary capping of repeat incidents at five, and I therefore expect the next crime stats to give a much more accurate picture of the scale of violence against women and girls. Unless we have reliable data, the Government and local authorities simply cannot plan and resource the correct response. It is impossible to prioritise women's services if they are unaware of the extent of the need. How can the Government resource the police correctly, for example, when they have no idea of what support is needed? As we have heard today, local authorities and domestic violence refuges are struggling to cope with the number of victims seeking help, and many are in crisis. When the Government have evidence of the true scale of the need, will they look to provide more specialist resources to local authorities and more resources directly to specialist services?

The Government's national statement of expectations gives guidance on what local authorities should be providing for victims of domestic and sexual violence, but guidance alone does not ensure that every woman in need can access services. The statement says that service commissioners must have sufficient specialist support provision, including specialist BME refuges, but local authorities are facing unprecedented budget cuts, forcing commissioners to value cost per bed over quality of service. Specialist services are closing as a result. So where can a woman and her children sleep on the night she leaves her violent partner if there is no refuge for her to go to? How can she rebuild her life if there are no specialist staff to counsel her and her children or support her to find a new home? The responsibility for

the delivery of domestic violence services cannot simply be devolved to local authorities in a haphazard and piecemeal way. Under the current system, the Government have no way of knowing whether provision for women is adequate or targeted at the right areas. Will the Minister commit today to mapping out the existing domestic violence and sexual violence provision across the country and to correlate it with a needs assessment? Will she recognise that the sheer scale of domestic violence requires a strategic central Government response, not simply a set of expectations for local authorities? Will the Government live up to the provisions in the Istanbul convention by ratifying it so that every survivor of domestic abuse has the right to access specialist services?

I remain absolutely committed to championing the cause of prevention. Violence against women and girls is not, and never will be, inevitable. Prevention is essential if we are ever to ensure that women and girls can live free from fear and be able to determine their own life. Yet we are seeing an ever-increasing normalisation of violence, staring out of advertising boards, computer screens and the mobile phones of little girls and boys. Through exposure to online pornography from an increasingly young age and messages conveyed in the media, children are growing up believing that violence and non-consensual sex in relationships is not just normal, but to be expected. At the same time, children are being pressured by adults and other children to engage in harmful sexual behaviour, such as sharing indecent images. Children are entering adulthood unable to recognise exploitative, abusive and manipulative behaviours. Teenage girls in my constituency tell me that they expect to be abused by their boyfriends because that is what being a girlfriend is about. The Government can no longer stand by and allow that. Will the Government introduce statutory, age-appropriate sex and relationships education in schools to give children the knowledge, resilience and confidence they need to recognise abusive or coercive behaviour and to challenge or contextualise the messages about sex and relationships they receive from the media?

Violence is perpetrated against women because they are women. Women are murdered by their boyfriends, husbands, sons, fathers and uncles in the UK and around the world, because those men believe that women are to be controlled and owned. Girls' genitals are mutilated, because it is believed that a women's sexuality belongs to her husband. Girls are denied education and forced into marriage, because girls' lives are valued less than boys'. They are afraid to leave the house, see their family or love their children, because they exist to please men. Women are murdered and tortured and abused at the hands of men, because this violence is structural and used to maintain male power and control. Until that is accepted across societies, Governments and institutions, we will never truly eradicate it. Until violence against women and girls is accepted as structural violence, perpetrators will still be allowed to cross-examine their victims in court, a little girl will continue to be told that he is groping her because he likes her, and girls will continue to grow up thinking that violence and manipulation are all part of being a woman. Ending violence against women and girls requires a radical, systematic societal shift in power and attitudes. It is the role of every Member of this House to live up to that.

2.32 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sarah Newton):** Today is a really important day that marks one of the UN's 16 days of action to eliminate violence against women and girls. This vital debate has shown our utter and united determination across the House to end these terrible crimes. I want to start by paying heartfelt thanks to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). To hear her talking about her rape when she was 14 years old, breaking the taboo by talking about it in this place, was truly remarkable. It was incredibly brave of her to talk, as she so eloquently did, about what happened to her. I am sure that her mother would be incredibly proud of her, because she will be helping so many women who are suffering in silence. If after listening to her just one woman picks up the phone and gets the support that is available, the hon. Lady will have saved someone's life. I am sure that many women will draw courage and inspiration from her today.

I also thank the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) who bravely talked about a serious sexual assault. She made a powerful speech, highlighting what she says are widespread attitudes towards and abuse of women in the industry in which she served. I give every power to her elbow and give her every encouragement to carry on talking about this to help women in that industry today not to have to suffer in the way that she did.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies), who also gave a moving, powerful speech about her dreadful personal experience of being a victim of stalking. I commend her for using that experience to campaign strongly since she became a Member. She played such an important part in bringing in the anti-stalking measures that were announced yesterday.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Seema Malhotra) for securing this debate and for the approach she took in her speech. I also thank my friend the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion), with whom we work so closely. She is right that it is absolutely essential that work must be cross-party and done across the House. There is simply no room for politics in this. We must keep the issue at the top of the political agenda by working together to get the cultural changes that we all want.

I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) for reminding the House of the Prime Minister's strong, persistent leadership on keeping women and girls safe at home and around the world. The Government appreciate the valuable work done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke and the Women and Equalities Committee, not least the report that we have discussed today.

Our goal remains simple: no woman should live in fear of abuse, and every girl should grow up knowing that she is safe. As we have heard today, violence and abuse can affect anyone, and while we do think that the prevalence of violence against women is going down, we are working to ensure that we have the right data. We published more data just yesterday to help us be sure about that, but we have a long way to go to reach our goal. While it is encouraging that more women feel able to come forward and that more prosecutions and convictions are being secured, we are absolutely not complacent.

Since 2010, we have done more than ever before to tackle violence against women and girls. In March, we launched the new violence against women and girls strategy and pledged over £80 million of funding to support that in the UK. We have strengthened the law and provided agencies with the tools they need to support victims, bring perpetrators to justice and prevent such crimes from happening in the first place. We have introduced new offences of coercive and controlling behaviour, stalking, forced marriage and FGM, and have banned revenge porn. On top of that good work, I am delighted that we announced yesterday some important new measures to tackle gender-based violence.

As we have heard, stalking is a devastating crime and can have serious consequences. Yesterday, we committed to introduce new civil stalking protection orders to protect victims and stop perpetrators at the earliest opportunity, before their behaviour becomes entrenched. We also launched a £15 million, three-year VAWG transformation fund to aid, promote and embed the best local practice that exists today and to ensure that early intervention and prevention become the norm, so that we can stop the awful gaps in services about which we heard today. Although we have a national framework and strategy, it is vital that local areas take ownership of and responsibility for the services in those areas, and that they put the victim at the centre of their approach to providing services, working together to incorporate the needs of a wide range of people. To help areas to do that, we published our national statement of expectations, on which we worked in partnership with a great many civil society organisations and the Local Government Association, to ensure that commissioning is the best it can be. We want good examples from across the country to be available to every community and every woman.

Included in the data we published yesterday was the domestic homicide review, which for the first time considered all the learning from examples of when things have gone badly wrong and individuals did not get access to services, and of when the statutory sector did not do everything possible to keep women safe, including the worst outcome of that leading to a death. By publishing this review and a series of recommendations, we will be able to make real progress. Included alongside that was better training for the chairs of domestic homicide reviews and funding to enable this work to carry on.

**Jim Shannon:** Will the Minister give way?

**Sarah Newton:** I am not going to give way, as I want to cover all the questions put to me.

Our new £15 million VAWG service transformation fund is just one part of the £80 million package that I talked about. This is the most central funding that any Government have put into tackling these terrible crimes, and it includes provision for rape support centres, national helplines and refuges. I am sure that our actions are backing up our strong words, and if more resources are needed, we will always keep that under review.

The police transformation fund has also funded programmes that support our work to end VAWG, and other sources of funding are available across the country, at the local and national levels. These sources include money from the troubled families programme; for victims' services; for dedicated mental health provision; for the tackling modern slavery programmes; and £15 million

from the tampon tax fund. I am particularly pleased that this year that fund recognised the incredibly important role that grassroots organisations play in addressing VAWG and they have a particular spot in the fund.

I was asked some very direct questions and I wish to answer them directly today; the red folder is on the Bench. First, let me say that abusive behaviour online is treated the same as such behaviour offline. The same prevention orders and the same tools to prosecute offenders for that behaviour online should be pursued. So please, Members, go out into your communities and spread the word that we must get law enforcement agencies to use those new powers.

**Mrs Miller:** Will the Minister give way?

**Sarah Newton:** I am sorry, but I do not really have enough time to do so.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) said that we must do more to educate children about healthy relationships, including sexual relationships, and that no must mean no in every circumstance. I think we all agree with that, and there is a huge amount of determination and ongoing work to deliver that. She is absolutely right to say that we all need to talk about this. As a mother of three children, I can say that it can be a bit embarrassing, not least for my children, having to sit down to talk about this; my son has just about recovered from having to talk to his mum about online porn. But it is essential that we all do this, and there is a lot of very good material to support us as citizens, as parents, as teachers and as youth workers to have those conversations. We are absolutely determined to make sure we work with partners such as the PSHE Association, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, and the range of excellent charities that do so much in this space, to make sure we have highly effective communications to really educate young boys and girls about good, healthy and safe relationships.

I was also asked to respond to the femicide report, and I will be writing to the Members who raised that, because it was a detailed report and I want to do it justice by responding to all the recommendations. The issue of perpetrator programmes was also raised. Clearly, they have an incredibly important role to play in trying to prevent harmful behaviour, but I am aware that not all of them are as good as we want them to be, so we are working with the charity Respect to revise the accreditation standards for these programmes.

We have also heard harrowing stories today about FGM and its continued prevalence. I just want to confirm to everyone the utter determination of the Prime Minister and of the Home Secretary, who has made this a personal challenge, to do everything we can to stamp out this vile and unacceptable practice in our country and all around the world.

Finally, there has been much talk about the ratification of the Istanbul convention today. I am proud that we signed that convention and I know that we will ratify it. I want to assure Members that the lack of ratification is not stopping us doing anything; we are already complying with every single aspect of that convention. We exceed most of its criteria, with the exception being the criterion relating to extra-territorial powers. Detailed and ongoing discussions are taking place between the Ministry of Justice and the devolved Administrations, particularly

Northern Ireland's, to get this right. We will not have time to go into all those details today, but we will be able to talk about this at length next Friday, and I looking forward to that debate.

In concluding, I wish to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), the hon. Members for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) and for Birmingham, Yardley, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), and the hon. Members for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Banff and Buchan (Dr Whiteford) for their powerful and insightful speeches today. This has been one of the finest debates I have had the pleasure of sitting through in this Chamber. I also want to underline, especially to the people outside the Chamber today, that I am sure that together we will be redoubling our efforts across Parliament and across civil society, through business and in conjunction with international partners, so that we when we meet again next year, we will have many more victories to celebrate and fewer failures to talk about.

Violence against women and girls simply has no place in a modern world. It harms individuals, families, communities, societies and the global economy. Through our determined effort, I am sure that we can make this history. It is important that we do this, not only because it is the right thing to do and because it is vital for women and girls, but because all humanity will reap the benefits.

2.46 pm

**Seema Malhotra:** Let me start by thanking the Minister and the shadow Minister for their helpful and valuable contributions at the end of this debate. I also wish to thank all the other Members who have taken part, making particular mention of my hon. Friend the Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), and the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and for Edinburgh West (Michelle Thomson). Let me echo the Minister's words by saying to the hon. Member for Edinburgh West that her mum would have been incredibly proud of her, and I am sure that her family are, as we all are. In her speech—the same could be said of those others—she put others first, ahead of herself. I thank her for doing that, as it will make a big difference to my constituents, too.

I also thank the Backbench Business Committee for its support and for allowing us to have this debate today. We have heard a range of contributions highlighting the heartening progress in some areas but the rolling back of the clock in others, with the description of the situation in Sierra Leone being an example of that. I thank the Minister for her comments on the questions that were raised, but it will not surprise her when I say that we were disappointed not to hear a commitment to compulsory relationship and sex education in schools, particularly given the urgency of that. I am sure this will not be the end of that debate. There was also a recognition of the need to ratify the Istanbul convention. We need the Government to lay out a timetable, one that we believe and know will be stuck to.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes the UN's International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence; further notes that violence

[Seema Malhotra]

against women is a human rights violation and prevents women and girls fulfilling their full potential; recognises that an estimated one in three women experience physical or sexual violence worldwide, but that violence against women and girls is not inevitable, and that prevention is possible and essential; and calls on the Government to work with other governments around the world to adopt comprehensive laws addressing violence against women and gender-based inequality and discrimination, to provide women-centred, specialist services to all survivors, and to fund key education and prevention programmes so that violence against women and girls is ended once and for all.

## Cancer Strategy

2.48 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Cancer Strategy one year on.

In moving this motion, which stands in my name and that of the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), I wish to recognise all those in the cancer community for all their work, day in, day out, fighting this disease, and the huge number of Members of this House who, through a wide range of cancer-related all-party groups, carry out work in this very important area.

The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay, who is chairman of the all-party group on cancer, is unable to be here today, but he wanted me to say how much he appreciates the Backbench Business Committee's granting this debate. As Members may know, the hon. Gentleman's wife is undergoing treatment, and I am sure that everyone in the House would want to send their best wishes to him and his family at this difficult time.

It is estimated that there are more than 2.4 million people living with cancer in the UK, and that number continues to grow. Cancer is becoming more complex, with many more treatments available. Many patients are living with co-morbidities and with the consequences of a cancer diagnosis many years after treatment has finished.

The all-party group on cancer has a proud record of successfully campaigning on a number of issues. Just two days ago, we held our annual Britain against Cancer conference in Central Hall—it is one of the largest cancer conferences in the UK. On behalf of the group, I wish to pass on thanks to all the contributors, including the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat), and the shadow Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth), for their contributions. Delegates very much appreciated everybody's input.

The last two years have seen significant developments in cancer policy. In July 2015, the independent cancer taskforce published the England cancer strategy. Since we last debated this issue in November last year, NHS England has published its England cancer strategy implementation plan, setting out how it will roll out the 96 recommendations.

More recently, we have seen the publication of the National Cancer Transformation Board's progress report, outlining what steps NHS England has taken over the past year in implementing these recommendations across the country. Only last Friday, the Office for National Statistics published the latest one-year cancer survival rate figures for those patients diagnosed in 2014 and followed up to 2015. As NHS England chief executive Simon Stevens pointed out at the Britain against Cancer conference, that showed the dramatic improvement in patient outcomes that has been achieved over the past 20 years. That is something to be celebrated, but there is still much more to do.

The all-party group has been active in monitoring progress on the England cancer strategy, holding a short inquiry early in the year to assess progress. We concluded that positive progress is being made, but that there is still much more to do to realise the ambition of

the England cancer strategy. Having taken evidence from a wide range of people, we made a number of recommendations, which I will use to highlight some of the key themes that emerged from the inquiry.

The first key recommendation focused on the need for greater clarity on funding for all the 96 recommendations of the England cancer strategy. It was positive, therefore, to see more detail in the National Cancer Transformation Board's progress report, which set out the funding available per year for the next four years. I very much welcome the announcement by Simon Stevens at our Britain against Cancer conference that Cancer Alliances will be able to bid for £200 million of funding to invest in early diagnosis, care for people living with cancer, and cancer after treatment. That is very good news, and I look forward to getting further clarity on how the full funding package, set out in the progress report, will be allocated across the cancer strategy's recommendations. This is particularly important given the lack of clarity around cancer funding to date. The estimates for the total amount spent on cancer care in the NHS per newly diagnosed patient have not been published beyond 2012-13, which has been described as a significant data gap when it comes to evaluating the cost and efficiency of cancer care. Will the Minister today commit to publish an update on those figures in the House of Commons Library at the earliest opportunity?

Alongside funding, another recommendation and concern that was raised by stakeholders in our inquiry was around the need for further transparency on how the cancer strategy is being delivered, what the priorities are, and who is responsible for delivering key recommendations. Again, the progress report from the National Cancer Transformation Board went some way to address that concern. However, further detail around how the strategy is being delivered, particularly the membership and terms of reference for the six oversight groups tasked with overseeing delivery, is vital to ensure that the wider cancer community is properly engaged.

We also heard from many organisations that were unclear on how the delivery of recommendations will be monitored at a local level.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): One of the things that shocked me in a debate on ovarian cancer was to find that there are parts of the country where CA125 is not routinely available to women who are suspected of having ovarian cancer. I have also had letters from a number of constituents who say that they are unable to get access to bisphosphonates, a drug that helps to prevent breast cancer. Did the all-party group come up with recommendations to try to ensure that wherever people live, they get the best possible cancer prevention and care? At present there clearly is not universal provision of these important diagnostic tests and drugs.

**Nic Dakin:** My right hon. Friend makes an important point about equal access across the country. We are all concerned about that and focused on it.

It is positive news that the 16 cancer alliances have been established and that NHS England will publish further guidance for alliances to help them develop their plans to deliver the cancer strategy locally, but if they are to monitor the delivery of the strategy, it is vital that they are given the right resource to do so effectively.

A particular issue which was raised in relation to both transparency and accountability was workforce. Most people, I believe, will agree with me when I say that our NHS workforce is under great strain. The cancer workforce is experiencing significant gaps in key areas, including radiography and clinical nurse specialists. For example, Anthony Nolan highlights the fact that access to post-transplant clinical nurse specialists is inconsistent across the country. At the same time, demand is growing, and cancer is becoming more complex, as patients often have multiple co-morbidities. Unless they are addressed, these workforce pressures will undoubtedly have a severe effect on cancer services.

Another area of growing need for cancer patients is access to timely and appropriate mental health support which, if achieved, can reduce pressures on other parts of the health service.

The all-party group welcomes the recommendation in the strategy that Health Education England would deliver a strategic review of the cancer workforce by March 2017, and we were grateful to Professor Ian Cumming for meeting us earlier this year. However, we have strong concerns about progress on this crucial piece of work. Although we are aware that a baseline report of the current cancer workforce has been produced, it has not been published, and there is currently little detail on how Health Education England is planning to conduct the strategic review. We are not aware of any plans from HEE to engage with the sector on the strategic review, and we continue to be concerned by the lack of transparency and involvement of the wider sector. We were pleased to see a reference to the strategic review of workforce in the Department of Health's mandate to HEE. Will the Minister outline how he is holding HEE to account on that recommendation?

Diagnosing cancer earlier improves survival rates, and the all-party group believes that focusing on outcome indicators such as the one-year survival rate is crucial to driving progress in this area. The inclusion of the one-year cancer survival indicator in the clinical commissioning group improvement and assessment framework—formerly the delivery dashboard—is very much welcomed by the all-party group, which has long campaigned for that. Since then, the all-party group has continued to champion this cause, and earlier this year at our annual summer reception we were the first to congratulate and recognise clinical commissioning groups that had improved their one-year cancer survival figures.

So it was music to our ears to hear Simon Stevens at this week's Britain against Cancer conference further commit NHS England to increasing its efforts on diagnosing cancer early. Last week the latest one-year cancer survival rates were published, and we were pleased to see an improvement, with the average one-year cancer survival rate in England standing at 70.4%. However, incremental improvements are not enough to match our neighbours in Europe and across the world, as our figures are below the standard set in countries such as Sweden, which has a one-year survival rate of 82%.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on pancreatic cancer, I am acutely aware of the difficulty of diagnosing some cancers early. My constituent Maggie Watts lost her husband to pancreatic cancer. Kevin's mother had died from pancreatic cancer 40 years earlier. Difficulty in early diagnosis is one of the reasons why the outcomes for pancreatic cancer had not improved

[*Nic Dakin*]

over those 40 years. Some 74% of patients across the UK cannot name a single symptom of pancreatic cancer, so there is a need for further cancer awareness campaigns to improve the outcomes for these “stuck” cancers, as well as further research into better diagnostic tools in these areas.

Be Clear on Cancer campaigns have been very effective but, as Bloodwise points out, we need further thought on how the NHS can work closely with cancer charities and patient organisations to increase awareness of cancers with non-specific symptoms, such as blood cancers.

I recently met representatives of the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, who were clear that early diagnosis of lung cancer dramatically improves patient outcomes for this, the biggest cancer killer. In some countries, screening for lung cancer is being introduced, with positive outcomes. Should we actively consider that here?

It is worth pausing to recognise the excellent work that public health campaigns have played in fighting cancer. Since the smoking ban was introduced nearly 10 years ago, the number of adult smokers in the UK has dropped by 1 million. Smoking cessation is still the most effective cancer preventive strategy, and all of us need to ensure that, when local government budgets are under pressure, that does not lead to reductions in public health budgets for short-term fiscal gain, with long-term negative health consequences and associated costs. As Cancer Research has made clear, the Government must publish the tobacco control strategy without delay.

The final recommendation I want to highlight from our inquiry is on a similar theme: the involvement of patients and organisations in the cancer community in the implementation of the cancer strategy across England. This recommendation has been supported by other groups, such as the Cancer Campaigning Group, which noted in its recent report that the National Cancer Transformation Board and the Independent National Cancer Advisory Group should collaborate with organisations with an expertise in cancer and involve patients in delivery.

The issue is particularly pertinent to people with rarer or less common cancers, many of which are childhood and teenage cancers. The all-party group was concerned when the cancer transformation board’s implementation plan did not highlight rarer cancers specifically. Rarer cancers—particularly those with vague symptoms—tend to be diagnosed later than most common cancers, with many diagnosed through emergency presentation. That not only impacts on survival but leads to poor patient experience. In addition, many patients with rarer cancers, and particularly those with blood cancers, can live with their conditions for many years, and it is vital that provision to support people living with and beyond cancer, such as the Recovery Package, consider the needs of these patients. While many of the recommendations in the cancer strategy will go some way to address that issue, it is vital that NHS England retain a strong focus on this group. What discussions has the Minister had with NHS England about how it is ensuring that organisations across the cancer community are involved in the delivery of the cancer strategy?

Currently, cancer medicines, including those for rare cancers, are appraised by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on a timetable designed to

ensure that a recommendation can be issued at the time of licence. However, there is growing recognition in the cancer community that current NICE methodology and process are not suitable for assessing treatments for rarer cancers, and that the one-size-fits-all model adopted by NICE could result in patients with rarer cancers losing out on access to treatments that patients in other developed countries are able to access.

There is an ongoing joint consultation by NICE and NHS England, which incorporates changes to highly specialised technology appraisal thresholds, introduces an affordability assessment and creates a fast-track route for highly cost-effective drugs. However, the consultation does not address or acknowledge any specific recommendations for the assessment of treatments for rarer cancers. Concern has been raised by the cancer community that this makes these available treatments vulnerable to always falling through the net. What is the plan to ensure that the NICE process and methodology applied to rarer cancers incorporate the limited patient numbers and data collection, rather than applying the same process irrespective of the rarity of the cancer? What additional flexibility will be applied to NICE criteria when assessing rare cancers, to account for inevitable uncertainties in clinical data?

In summary, it is important to recognise the progress that is being made in implementing the cancer strategy one year on, but there is much more to do. Together, properly supported by Government, those in the cancer community are willing and eager to deliver the better outcomes that would mean we were not just closing the gap on better-performing nations but beginning to lead the way.

3.4 pm

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me early in this debate. May I express my sincere thanks to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), and to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)? Of course, I join the whole House in sending our best wishes to my hon. Friend’s wife at a very difficult time. I also pay tribute to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing time for this vital debate about the cancer strategy which was published almost 18 months ago in July last year.

I am going to confine my remarks to the issue of blood cancers, and hope to be concise. There are 137 different types of blood cancer, although many of them are not well understood by the general public, and awareness is relatively low. In fact, blood cancers are the fifth most common type of cancer that people are diagnosed with in this country, and, sadly, the third biggest killer. It therefore deserves much greater awareness and understanding, and further efforts by the Department of Health and the national health service to ensure that patients who are diagnosed and their families are properly supported. I thank the hon. Member for Scunthorpe for raising that issue.

I was initially very unaware of the issue of blood cancer; my knowledge was relatively vague. That was until midway through 2012, when after only a few weeks of being ill with flu-like symptoms, my mother was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia, and within 24 hours of diagnosis unfortunately passed away. Sadly, this experience has been revisited in my office. One of my employees, Tom, who also works for my hon. Friend

the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), found out only weeks ago that his mother has unfortunately been diagnosed with leukaemia. I know that the House will join me in sending our best wishes to her and to her family.

The issue of blood cancers often comes thundering into people's lives unexpectedly, because it does not, perhaps, have the same profile as solid tumour cancers. Indeed, I mentioned my mother's experience of being ill for a short time and being diagnosed very late. Unfortunately, the national cancer patient experience survey has shown that a third of those who are diagnosed with blood cancers have gone to see their GP twice before they finally get that diagnosis, again because of the lack of awareness.

In relation to our efforts here in Parliament, I am pleased that just before the summer recess I was able, with the help of other right hon. and hon. Members, to establish the all-party parliamentary group on blood cancer. I am delighted to see the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) in his place—he is a very key member of that group—as we seek to raise awareness of this issue. I would like to put on the record my sincere thanks to the Speaker for allowing Bloodwise, the cancer charity that is the secretariat to the all-party group, to hold an awareness event in his apartments in September.

The Minister is very diligent and works very hard, and in the short time he has held his well-deserved position he has been very kind and generous to me when responding to health concerns. I would be grateful if the issue of blood cancers was specifically addressed, so that the patient pathway and patient experience can be improved with regard to general awareness, diagnosis and the treatment and care provided by our national health service.

3.10 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who has made a very strong case on blood cancers. I am sure that the Minister was listening and I suspect that he will respond positively.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) on opening the debate. I also congratulate him and his colleague on the all-party parliamentary group on cancer, the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), on securing it. I echo the hon. Member for Crawley in wishing the hon. Gentleman's wife and family well in the treatment that they are undertaking.

I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I have received briefings from Action on Smoking and Health and from Cancer Research UK, as well as a copy of the British Lung Foundation's expert working group report on lung cancer, and I thought that it would be appropriate to reinforce some of the points that they make. I checked that there was no massive pressure on time and that I would be able to make those points were I to catch your eye, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I am grateful to you for calling me.

I thank Deborah Arnott from ASH and Lucy Absolom for their briefings, which I found very helpful. I should point out that I have had four basal cell carcinomas removed from my face. Fortunately, the biopsy on all of them found that they were benign, but my consultant dermatologist has recommended that I wear a hat to

protect my Scottish features from the southern sun and the ultraviolet rays, which are even more worrying. Being married to a doctor, I always take very careful notice of any clinical advice that I am given, to avoid the risk of being criticised for not listening to those who are more intelligent and better qualified than me. I thank the good doctors at the Aberfeldy health centre and the dermatology department of the Royal London hospital for their assistance in protecting me.

I will start with the bad news. All three of the briefings that I have received have many positive things to say about the Government's cancer strategy. I also think that, on the whole, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe was positive in his opening remarks. There are clearly some questions to be asked, and I will do so, but the briefings are more supportive than critical of what the Government and the clinicians of NHS England are trying to achieve.

The ASH briefing begins:

"The UK's Cancer Strategy...for England 2015-2020 recommends the publication of a new Tobacco Control Plan within 12 months as a key element of its first strategic priority, a radical upgrade in prevention and public health. If this target had been met a new Plan would have been published in July 2016. However six months on, and a year since the last Tobacco Control Plan expired, there is still no new Plan."

That is a major criticism in the briefings. ASH goes on to say:

"The previous Tobacco Control Plan achieved its ambitions to reduce smoking rates: adults fell from 21.2% to below 18.5%, 15 year olds from 15% to below 12% and among pregnant women from 14% to 11% or less. The Government must publish a new plan to build on this progress."

I apologise to the Minister if the plan has been published, but my hon. Friend clearly suggested that it has not, so when will it be published? We would be grateful if the Minister gave us any encouragement that it is due sometime soon. The data show how successful the previous plan was at cutting the number of smokers and, consequently, reducing the exposure of non-smokers, especially children, to second-hand smoke.

I should own up to being an ex-smoker. I started in my early teens, and I gave up at 21.35 hours on 4 November 1980. The fact that I remember the minute does not indicate that I miss it at all. I remember it because it was during a "Panorama" programme that highlighted the legs of a chap who was, it became apparent later, in a wheelchair. The poor gentleman had suffered thrombosis in both legs and had had amputations on both legs. The camera eventually got to his face, and we could see that he was still smoking cigarettes. My then wife was pregnant at the time, and giving up smoking seemed a very sensible thing to do. I had tried to do so 18 months previously, when I gave up for six months. However, I burned my hand badly in a fire, and the first thing I asked as I was being taken to hospital—after six months off cigarettes—was, "Will somebody give me a cigarette?" It took me 18 months to get back off them, but I managed to quit.

When I joined the London fire brigade, two thirds of firemen—as it was in those days—smoked. This is only anecdotal, but 23 years later two thirds of fire fighters did not smoke. That demonstrates the change in attitudes to health and fitness within the service, and it reflects a similar change in attitudes in society towards smoking. All the positive policies that have been introduced,

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

such as no smoking in public buildings, demonstrate that we live in a society that is completely different from 30 or 40 years ago.

On a new plan for tobacco control, which we hope will be published shortly, I would be grateful if the Minister shared his thoughts ahead of publication on what targets we might expect from 2020 onwards for reducing adult smoking numbers, what budget might be set aside for mass media campaigns and what support might be available for stop-smoking services. Those services reduce health inequalities, because most of the people who access them are from more deprived communities. That will help many of my constituents, appropriately. The last plan clearly worked, and we need a new one.

Cancer Research UK's briefing states:

"If the strategy is implemented in full then it is estimated that 30,000 more lives could be saved per year by 2020. 11,000 of those lives will be saved through improvements to early diagnosis."

That is one of the strong points that my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe made. Cancer Research UK stated that it had not seen the progress needed on the plan. On prevention, it states:

"4 in 10 cancers are preventable. We need a radical upgrade in prevention to ensure the future sustainability of the NHS and reduce cancer incidence."

Cancer Research UK wants the Government to publish the tobacco control strategy without further delay, as does ASH, and it wants the Government to extend existing junk food TV marketing restrictions to the 9 pm watershed to reduce children's exposure to marketing by more than half. The briefing states that

"urgent action needs to be taken to ensure the NHS cancer workforce is adequately equipped to deal with rising demand and improving care...We welcome the commitment to increase the spend on diagnostics by up to an additional £300 million by 2020, but need clarity over how this is being allocated and used in local areas to improve earlier diagnosis. In addition, the national Diagnostic Capacity Funding must also be continued."

Those points were also raised by my hon. Friend. The briefing states:

"Cancer waiting times targets are being consistently missed...suggesting there are still thousands of people not having the tests they need on time."

As I have said, Cancer Research UK has also made a lot of positive comments. On governance and the progress made on implementation so far, the charity states:

"We welcome the appointment of Cally Palmer as National Cancer Director and Chris Harrison as National Clinical Director for Cancer...We welcome the establishment of the Cancer Alliances across the country...We welcome the priority that has been given to earlier diagnosis in the first year and the commitment to invest more."

Cancer Research UK welcomes NHS England's proposed investment of £130 million for over 100 replacements or upgrades of radiotherapy machines over the next two years in hospitals in England. It says:

"Replacing the machines will mean that more patients can access the innovative radiotherapy which plays a vital role in curing cancer, slowing the growth of tumours and improving quality of life for cancer patients."

Its final question is about the Government's commitment of £300 million by 2020 to improve diagnostic capacity, which was also raised by my hon. Friend. It asks for

"clarification on how this money is being allocated and used in local areas and how its impact is being evaluated."

As I said at the beginning, not only are not all the comments from respected organisations critical of the Government's policy, but they are actually complimentary about their policy and approach, apart from for the absence of a tobacco control plan. That key absence has been highlighted by all the charities and research organisations concerned. I want to reinforce the point to the Minister that there have been lots of positive comments, because this is not just the Opposition being critical of the Government. There are lots of great and positive stories, but there is that one absence.

As my hon. Friend said, and as I have said on behalf of Cancer Research UK and ASH, we want the Minister to answer a number of questions. If he is not in a position to do so today, it would be very welcome if he asked his officials to write to those of us involved in this debate in due course with additional information. I look forward to hearing the comments of the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), and of the Minister in response to this debate.

3.21 pm

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): I am most grateful to you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this important debate.

I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) talking about his experiences of smoking. I gave up smoking before a flight with a parliamentary delegation coming back from Bahrain nearly 15 years ago, and I have never looked back. One of the drivers that made me give up smoking was a conversation with the then Member for Manchester, Withington—I would call him an hon. Friend, but he was an Opposition Member—who is now Lord Bradley. Like the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse, I remember smoking in the House. I remember lighting up in a Standing Committee and being reprimanded, but we could smoke in the Library Room C then. I offered the then Member for Manchester, Withington a cigarette in the Tea Room—we could smoke anywhere then, as well as in the Smoking Room—and he said, "David, no thanks. I've got an emphysema hospital in my constituency." That really hit home.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) is nodding. May I pay tribute to him? He was at the Britain against Cancer conference on Tuesday, which I attended as an officer of the all-party group on cancer. He has served on that group for much longer than I have, and he chaired the meeting in the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). Other hon. Members have paid tribute to my hon. Friend, and of course to his wife, who is undergoing treatment at the moment. I want to say what a great job my hon. Friend has done to drive this agenda on the Conservative Benches. It just shows that if you follow something you believe in in this House, you can get dramatic results.

As a politician, I often think that we should be able to sum up something, such as a very wordy report, in just a phrase or a sentence. That may be because of my background in advertising many years ago. Those dramatic results were clearly illustrated by Simons Stevens, when he said that in 1999, 60% of cancer patients survived, but in 2014, the figure was 70%. We went over some of those figures, which I thought were truly remarkable and really very encouraging.

I want to focus on something else that Simon Stevens said, which the hon. Member for Scunthorpe has mentioned. He announced £200 million of funding at the conference:

“The £200m fund has been set up to encourage local areas to find new and innovative ways to diagnose cancer earlier, improve the care for those living with cancer and ensure each cancer patient gets the right care for them.”

That includes aftercare treatment. What do we do when a patient has had chemotherapy and then there is nothing else—they have not been given any other options, so they feel depressed and unhappy?

That is where my main experience in this House comes in, as I have worked on integrated healthcare—holistic medicine, I suppose—with the all-party parliamentary group on integrated healthcare for nearly 30 years. I have been an officer of the group for nearly 25 years, and have chaired it for quite a while. It feels almost as if our time has come. It has now been clearly recognised that part of the cancer package should be a wide range of support. We can see that all over the country. I was at LOROS last week, which is where very ill people in Leicestershire go for their last few days. A range of different therapies were being offered there. That is happening not just in my constituency but in many others.

I return to the conference mentioned by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe—[*Interruption.*] I see he has now been promoted to the Front Bench. That is the great thing about the Opposition—the Front-Bench team changes so quickly that we can never be sure where any hon. Members are. I remember that when I was a young Member the advice I was given was always to sit in the same place in the House so that the Speaker knew where you were. In that case, it is a wonder that any Opposition Members get called at all, because they are always moving around the Benches. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe has clearly been promoted this afternoon, so congratulations.

One battle I have had over the years has been with the medical establishment about what should be included in treatments on the health service. It has been an ongoing battle against vested interests in the medical establishment who do not want to see money leaking from their own particular silos. That is down to scarce resources. One of the most interesting stalls at the Britain against Cancer conference on Tuesday was about cancer detection dogs. Even I gasped when I saw it—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who has also had experience of cancer and has contributed so much in her short time in this House to addressing cancer problems, is nodding and smiling. Just as we have dogs in this House—I will not say when or where they go—to detect things that may have been placed here by people who do not particularly agree with what we do, so it is possible to use dogs to detect cancer. If that is possible, I suspect that the authorities in the health service have not run double-blind placebo-controlled trials to establish whether it works. It works on the basis of experience, because the dogs are trained to detect by smell when people have developed cancer.

On the great battleground with the orthodox proponents of orthodox medicine, the battle line has in recent years been drawn on something called evidence-based medicine. We are told that in the health service medicine should always be evidence-based, and nothing should be used

unless it meets that criterion. I had a look at that, and got the Library to look the papers up. It goes back to 1992 and a statement by Professor Sackett that various other academics then ran with—there was a Professor Guyatt also. But when saying how important evidence-based medicine was, Professor Sackett also said:

“Good doctors use both individual clinical expertise and the best available external evidence, and neither alone is enough. Without clinical expertise, practice risks becoming tyrannized by external evidence, for even excellent external evidence may be inapplicable to or inappropriate for an individual patient. Without current best external evidence, practice risks becoming rapidly out of date, to the detriment of patients.”

It is hardly a secret that we were discussing Brexit in the House yesterday and that we have been very much involved in the whole debate since the summer—and for many of us, a long time before that. One problem in healthcare in relation to the EU has been the imposition of directives on the UK that have negatively impacted support services in healthcare. The traditional herbal medicines directive requires Chinese medical practitioners to show 30 years’ usage of a particular medicine in the UK, or 15 years under other circumstances, and bans a whole range of complex preparations freely available, and produced to very high standards in modern factories, in the People’s Republic of China.

Before I came to the Chamber this afternoon, I was at a Chinese medical clinic. I practise what I preach and have acupuncture once a month. I take Chinese herbal medicine and I think it has kept me away from antibiotics, steroids and other drugs for a good few years. I talked to practitioners about what they are able to do for cancer patients. There is a very long list of types of cancer that can be treated using traditional Chinese herbal medicine: cervical cancer, Non-Hodgkin lymphoma, HIV, colon cancer, head and neck cancer, breast cancer and prostate cancer. The list goes on.

I believe that several of my constituents are alive today because they have used Chinese medicine. It strengthens one’s immune system and is very effective after cancer treatment. It deals with particular symptoms. I asked the practitioner this afternoon what conditions she would expect to be able to alleviate using Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture. She said: tiredness, lack of energy, fevers, headaches, hypertension, dry skin, seizures and involuntary muscular twitching.

We have to broaden the scope of services available on the health service to help to meet patient demand. I hope the £200 million fund will mean a further widening of the scope of services available. My hon. Friend the Minister, who is new to his post, could do a lot worse than contact the head of the Professional Standards Authority, Harry Cayton. Harry Cayton’s organisation oversees the regulation of 23 different health organisations, including about 20,000 providers. If we go to the trouble of regulating different therapies, or having oversight of that regulation, why on earth do we not use it? What is the point of having a statutory regulator that checks the oversight when we do not actually use its services? That is a great mistake.

My hon. Friend the Minister could do a lot worse than go around the country and look at some of the practices that help cancer patients in remission. One of the best is the award-winning Velindre cancer centre in south Wales. Each year, it sees over 5,000 new referrals and about 50,000 new out-patient appointments. It

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employs over 670 staff and has an annual budget of over £49 million. The money for that service, which is widely used by doctors, comes not from the Department but from charitable donations. At that centre, they use reflexology, reiki healing, which I have studied over the years, aromatherapy, and breathing and relaxation techniques, and they have spectacular results.

Another wonderful clinic that my hon. Friend would do well to visit—it is a few stops on the District line from here, in Fulham—is the Breast Cancer Haven. It offers a range of therapies to combat stress, and I have attended its sessions. It is wonderful to see people suffering from breast and other cancers being given hope that chemotherapy is not the end of the road and that there is something out there to support them.

Another wonderful organisation of which my hon. Friend should be aware, and which was at the cancer conference on Tuesday, is Penny Brohn UK, the living well with cancer organisation. It has worked hard to produce a report on the long-term impact of its living well course, and the results from the five-year follow-up show a high approval rating among patients. The figures are staggering: 97% of patients reported making positive lifestyle changes after the course; 75% said they had maintained the positive changes for four to five years or were still maintaining them; and 85% said the living well course had enabled them to self-manage their health more effectively.

My hon. Friend, being well aware of Government policy, will know that patient choice is, according to the Health Secretary in the last Parliament, at the heart of the health service. If we are to give patients choice, we have to give them the provision to choose from. I was a member of the Health Committee for the whole of the last Parliament—I chaired it for a while when Stephen Dorrell stood down, before my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) took over—as well as a member of the Science and Technology Committee, both of which looked at the complex problems of polypharmacy and polymorbidity, which is jargon for too many people taking too many drugs and nobody really knowing what those drugs do. We need to reduce that.

There is a crisis in this country with antimicrobial and antibiotic resistance—we are not getting new antibiotics into the pipeline—and part of the problem is that we are trying to create new drugs while also trying to reduce antibiotic use. There is a range of other therapies that can help patients stay away from antibiotics. I will not get called to order, Madam Deputy Speaker; I know that this is a cancer debate, but a lot of alternative therapies—I will get to the H word, homeopathy, in a minute—offer options at a time when mainstream medicine is running out of solutions.

I have always championed the cause of homeopathy in this House, and I want to relate that strictly to cancer this afternoon. Homeopaths do not claim to cure cancer, but my goodness they can assist people who have had cancer and who are in remission by helping them to adjust their moods and to deal with anxiety and sleeplessness. It is a great tragedy that a tiny number of people, whom I regard at best as foolish and at worst as wicked, are trying to erase the tiny sum of money—£500 million—spent on homeopathy in the health service. Without looking at the benefits, they argue that it is a waste of money.

We have seen the pressure on institutions at Liverpool and elsewhere. What could be more stupid than to attack a medical system that is widely used in France, that voters went for in Switzerland, and that is used across the world, including in India and Brazil? What is the problem here?

I was in Toulouse to look at British Aerospace work recently, and I found a homeopathic chemist right in the middle of the main square there. Some 90% of pregnant women in France use homeopathy. The Minister must not be bludgeoned by the tiny number of people who use legal threats and resist it. Simon Stevens is now coming up with new money for aftercare for cancer, so we need to look out of the box and consider new possibilities. We are not even looking at some possibilities that are orthodox.

As I said, I am an officer of the cancer group, and I chaired a meeting the other day to hear anxious and anguished professors of medicine from this country talking about a new mainstream treatment called Target for breast cancer. Target is about putting a small device the size of a tangerine on the end of a cricket stump into an incision in the chest. The chemotherapy treats the tumour and not all the other organs in the chest. The professors saw this as a great breakthrough. It was invented in Britain, and it is widely available in Europe. How come NICE has only given it draft clearance? What is going on? Professors of medicine are saying that this is hugely important, yet we are not actually dealing with it.

**Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con):** On that particular point about targeted interoperable radiotherapy, I too have spoken to these professors, and I understand where they are in the clearance process. I find it a little bit concerning when there is a lack of money in the system. Is my hon. Friend aware that there are half a dozen machines around the country that could deliver that targeted therapy? Perhaps we need to look at what we should do first—whether it is purchasing the machines or giving the clearance in full.

**David Tredinnick:** My hon. Friend makes her point very well. In his excellent presentation, Simon Stevens talked about bringing new equipment onstream for radiography, I believe. [Interruption.] Yes, my hon. Friend was there, and she confirms this. I certainly agree with what she said, and we need to wake up to what is being invented in Britain and used across the world.

I shall conclude shortly, in case anyone else is hoping to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to finish with a couple of other points. There are other treatments out there, to which people turn in desperation when they reach the end of their conventional treatments. One of them is called oxygen therapy, and broadly speaking it means getting more oxygen than is normally received, from a container. It is not a very expensive treatment, and the information I am getting is that it produces spectacular results when it comes to energising people and improving their sense of self-worth and wellbeing.

My final point is one that I find amazing. In the great cancer hospitals and clinics of this country, diet is seen as a sideline. In some of these institutions, the diet is, frankly, appalling, but I am not going to name any of them this afternoon. Like most colleagues, I have a big enough postbag already and I do not want to hear

the defence. Anyone attending a big clinic in America, such as the Mayo Clinic, can say goodbye to dairy and sugar, and hello to more juices. The Haven in Fulham certainly uses a lot of raw juices and raw vegetables. Diet is absolutely fundamental. When I worked in the computer industry, we used to say “Garbage in; garbage out”—and the same applies to humans. Our outputs as a being—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) does me the honour of laughing, but it is true. Diet is such a soft ball to hit, is it not? We are spending millions of pounds on all these expensive treatments, but what about telling people to cut back on sugar? Well, there we are.

I have tried to address some of the issues following the landmark speech at a landmark conference on Tuesday. For the first time, we have seen a lot of money set aside for developing aftercare for patients and improving services around mainstream medicine.

My hon. Friend the Minister has a great opportunity to make his mark in the House. His Department is, I believe, the fourth largest employer in the world. I think the Red Army comes top and McDonald's second; I expect another burger provider comes third; and my hon. Friend is presiding over part of an organisation that comes fourth. His brief gives him enormous opportunities to improve the quality of life of cancer patients in this country, and by the time he has finished, there should not be just an increase in the cancer survival rate from 60% to 70%—his target should be 80%.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rest my case.

3.45 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to debate these issues. I commend the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for his presentation and for setting the scene so well, and, in his absence, I commend the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). I hope and pray that his wife is keeping much better. I know that if he were here, he would be making a valuable contribution. He may be watching the debate from afar, but, in any event, we hope that everything goes well for him.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving us an opportunity to take part in this debate on a Thursday afternoon. I also thank the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who is the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on blood cancer, and who chairs it very well. He was instrumental in setting up the group, and we thank him for that. We are all very pleased to work alongside him, and to join in his endeavours.

As we know, the latest figures provided by Macmillan Cancer Support indicate that by the end of the current Parliament, one in two people will suffer from a form of cancer during their lifetimes. It is a sobering thought that, technically speaking, 50% of the 12 or so Members who are present in the Chamber now could be in that position in the next few years.

It is clear that improvements in diagnosis and treatment of the disease mean that more people are surviving it, or living for longer with it, and, as a consequence, 2.5 million people are living with or beyond it in the UK today. My father was a cancer survivor on three occasions. The hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) mentioned diet, and it is true that diet cannot be ignored as an element that we can use. As I have said, my dad—who passed away last year—survived cancer three times, and

he lived for some 38 years after he was first diagnosed. He was very careful about his diet, and I believe that that was a factor in his survival. The doctors told him to be careful with his diet. However, he survived for three main reasons: the skill of the surgeons, the care of the nurses, and the fact that he was a man of great faith: the Prayer for God's People was very important to him.

Nevertheless, the sheer scale of the problem of cancer demands a co-ordinated and proactive strategy. The Minister knows that I hold him in the utmost respect, as does every one of us in the House, but I must say to him that we need a strategy that will cover the whole of that problem. I am going to make some constructive comments, and I am convinced that his response will be the one that we hope to hear.

There is more that can and, indeed, must be done. It would be remiss of us not to mention the charities with which we are all involved, or of which we all know. There is Marie Curie, which does wonderful work, there is Action on Cancer, and there is Macmillan Cancer Support, and I am only mentioning those that I have direct contact with. There are also church groups. Elim church in Newtownards, in my constituency, has a cancer group that meets every Friday. There are different groups that go to different places. I think that faith is very important when it comes to this issue.

I raised this issue during the debate on NHS funding, because cancer funding is an essential component of that. Macmillan has said that about one in four people living with or beyond cancer face disability or poor health following their treatment, and that that can remain the case for many years after treatment has ended. We should sometimes consider the care needs of cancer survivors who must face disabilities and a different lifestyle with which their families must also come to terms. It is vital that they are able to access the best care that is right for them when they need it, and to ensure that the NHS is set up to meet the changing needs of cancer patients. We have to have an NHS that responds to patients' needs. Not only would this increase the quality and experience of survival, but it would ensure that resources put into tackling the disease are invested in the most efficient way. We must closely co-operate with cancer charities and patients to ensure that the NHS can respond in the best way possible.

This efficient use of money is key for the “Five Year Forward View” projections, indicating that expenditure on cancer services will need to grow by about 9% a year, reaching £13 billion by 2020-21. However, £13 billion of spending in 2020-21 and increased investment through the “Five Year Forward View” is what is required just to stand still. So while the figures look good, the needs indicate that we will have to look at the figures and the available funding again. This level of spending is likely to yield outcomes that continue to be below average when compared with similar international healthcare systems.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe referred in his opening speech to international care and the need for us to be batting above our position on the international stage, and I agree. Now is therefore the time to ensure that money is spent as effectively as possible to give England and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland a better chance to achieve world-class cancer outcomes and deliver on the Government's manifesto commitment. It is clear that we need greater funding of

[Jim Shannon]

research, and while charities do a wonderful job, and we appreciate them very much, there is most certainly a Government role that can be better fulfilled.

All Members have received the “Together for short lives” briefing, and it prompts me to highlight to the Minister the fact that there are barriers to research into children’s palliative care, which is a subject close to all our hearts when we have children of our own, and grandchildren as many of us now have. Despite improving survival rates, cancer is the leading cause of death in children, teenagers and young adults. The survival rate is significantly lower for teenagers and young adults than for children for several cancer types, including bone tumours and soft tissue sarcomas.

About 250 children aged zero to 14 lose their lives to cancer every year in the UK. In children aged 1 to 14, this is around one fifth of deaths. For teenagers and young adults, cancer accounts for around 310 deaths per year in the UK. I make a plea for children’s palliative care. I am sure that the civil servants will be looking for some notes to pass to the Minister to let him know what has been done, but I want to know what will be done in future as well.

The cancer strategy recommended that by September 2016 a proposal should be developed to ensure that all children, teenagers and young adults diagnosed with cancer are asked at diagnosis for consent for their data and a tissue sample to be collected for use in future research studies. Data collection is important so that we can look to the future by studying the information and responding in such a way to give better help down the road. The strategy also states that NHS England should work with research funders to make best use of these resources in the future. What action can the Minister take to make sure that NHS England works to remove barriers to including children and young people with cancer in research?

Smoking has been mentioned, which reminds me of my first cigarette. I think I was five. My grandfather smoked Gallahers; there was no filter in them, and they were the strongest cigarettes in the world. Wee boys look up to their grandfathers, and I thought, “My Grandad is a great fella and he smokes away at those cigarettes. I wonder what it’s like.” I pestered my grandfather to let me try one, and he said, “Take a deep breath.” I did, and it would not be untrue to say that I was the colour of these Green Benches, and was violently sick. I never had any wish ever again to smoke a cigarette; if that is how to learn the lesson, I certainly learned it.

The Minister will know that I have a deep interest in Queen’s University Belfast and in the great research work that it does. It is world renowned for its medical research and especially for the research it carries out in the field of cancer. It is innovative, and it is looking into new drugs and medications to address cancers. Yes, we have survival rates of 50% or more, but we are still looking for the one drug that will cure all cancers, and to do that, we need research. I know that this is not the Minister’s direct responsibility, but I know that he has as deep an interest in this matter as I do.

The evidence-enabled outcomes research to inform precision oncology innovation adoption by health systems that is pioneered by Queen’s highlights how Northern Ireland punches above its weight in this rapidly evolving

area, which is providing us with new approaches to prevent and treat this killer disease and preserve and improve the lives of cancer survivors. This success can and must be replicated by making greater funding available for research facilities and grants designated to changing the way in which cancer is approached and dealt with.

We have only to think of just how far the diagnosis of cancer has come in 50 years. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe spoke earlier of the achievements in this field, and also mentioned how far we still have to go. Queen’s University has partnerships with local businesses, and many foreign students come there to do their degrees and contribute to the research. There are also partnerships between Queen’s and universities here on the mainland, involving a wonderful group of universities and people making these things happen. They are making a difference through their research into cancer and the drugs that we need.

If we are to treat cancer successfully, we can do so only by adopting a continually updated approach. We have the initiative and desire to do this, but we need to ensure that the funding is in place as well. Governments need to take a positive interest in providing financial resources to ensure that everything is done to find the ultimate cure for cancer. Any strategy must make that clear, and the Minister must ensure that the necessary funding is available and enhanced when we negotiate Brexit. Brexit is mentioned in every debate we have now, but it is a fact of life. We have moved on, but we need assurances in this regard. I think we are having a debate on 19 December on the effect of Brexit on our universities.

We also need to address the postcode lottery in relation to the availability of cancer drugs. Again, this is not a criticism of the Minister—I do not do that—but it is a fact that cancer drugs are much more readily available in some parts of the UK than in others. In the past, central Government have supported the regional and devolved Administrations with funding for drugs. Is that anywhere in the equation at the moment? What discussions does he have with the regional and devolved Administrations—the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly—on agreeing cancer strategies and bids for resources?

A cancer strategy is a difficult one to negotiate, and it seems as though there can never be enough investment. We have to ask ourselves certain questions. Are we investing in the right things and producing the best outcomes? Are we sowing seeds for the future, and are we doing the best we can with what we have? It is up to each of us to raise these questions, and, for my part, I feel we must set aside more, do more and achieve more for the one in two people who will be effected by cancer.

3.58 pm

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): I should like to add my words of thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for securing the debate. I very much regret the circumstances that mean he cannot be here today. It is unusual to be having a debate on cancer without him, as he works diligently on these matters. I send him my best wishes.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on brain tumours, I very much welcomed the new cancer strategy that was announced in the Chamber just over a year ago, and I am delighted that we have this opportunity to scrutinise it again now. I congratulate the Government

on their focus and their direction of travel, and on the fact that survival times are constantly going up. We are absolutely going in the right direction, but like all hon. Members, I want to push the Government to go further, particularly in relation to brain tumours.

We heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) about the difficulty of early diagnosis of blood cancers and from the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) about pancreatic cancers. Early diagnosis, about which we hear time and again, is also a problem with brain tumours. People are often turned away by doctors and the cancer is found at the last moment. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) spoke about prevention, but unfortunately we think that only 1% of brain tumours may be preventable, so it is not really an area of exploration for us.

For patients with brain tumours, the only hope of a cure is through research and innovation into the many types of tumour. While such tumours represent just slightly under 3% of all cancers, they are the biggest killer among cancers of children and people under the age of 40. As for years of life lost, it is a devastating disease. Surprisingly, just 1% of the national cancer spend has gone into research into this area of cancer since 2002, which is clearly an injustice for those suffering from brain tumours and is why survival times have not been improving. Brain tumour research remains perennially underfunded, which was highlighted by the excellent Petitions Committee report—its first ever—into brain tumour research funding and the fine Westminster Hall debate. As a result, the Government set up a “task and finish” working group, for which I am extremely grateful. I look forward to the work that that brings forward, but we are not there yet and more must be done.

From reading the NHS’s “One year on” progress report, it appears that there has been much focus on meeting the clinical service recommendations set out in the original strategy. That should be welcomed, but there has been rather less focus on the research and innovation recommendations. While I recognise the importance of clinical services and their potential to improve outcomes in the diagnosis, treatment and care of people affected by brain tumours, we need equal, if not more, focus on research and innovation into potential cures. To that end, I have a few observations to make about several of the research points in the progress report and how realistic they are for patients with brain tumours and about research into the disease.

The report mentions a focus on modernising radiotherapy services and embedding research in the latest investment. Given the location, brain tumour radiotherapy comes with complex side effects, including increases in cranial pressure for some patients, alongside the more common side effects. More precise stereotactic radiotherapy is welcome, but it still does not represent a cure for many brain tumour patients, only an extension of life. The report states that a key 2020-21 metric is an

“Increase in five and ten year survival, with 57% surviving ten years or more”.

However, Brain Tumour Research’s latest report on national research funding, released in October, shows that five-year survival for brain tumour patients is a mere 19.7% in England, lagging far behind other cancers. With a one year survival rate of 46.5%, which is well below the NHS’s 2020 target of 75%, the NHS looks set not to meet its own key measure on brain tumours. In doing so, it is letting down brain tumour patients.

A key paragraph from the NHS progress report states:

“Although a commitment has been made, NHS England has yet to publish its 2016/17 research plan, leaving the NHS without an up-to-date strategy for research. Now that the Accelerated Access Review has been published, we hope that the NHS England research plan is also delivered without delay.”

That appears to be an admission of prioritising other objectives over research. Clinical services are important in the here and now but without proper planning and investment into medical research, ongoing improvements in health outcomes of many diseases will not be realised, and brain tumour patient outcomes will continue to stagnate when compared with other cancers. I welcome many aspects of the progress report, including the launch of a new integrated cancer dashboard to ensure greater analysis of patient outcomes in local areas. I would be grateful to know whether phase 2 of the dashboard will include data on brain tumours, as they do not appear to have been collected in phase 1.

The launch of the national “Be Clear on Cancer” campaign will also hopefully lead to faster diagnosis of cancer for all patients. However, Brain Tumour Research’s latest report shows that, according to the National Cancer Research Institute, the Government spend on brain tumour research represents just 0.52% of its total spend on cancer. It is clear that brain tumour research continues to be drastically underfunded, even with the cancer strategy in place. Therefore, although the strategy is a major step in the right direction, it will need to be made to work for all types of cancer, including the rarer ones and, in particular, brain tumours. Every week, a family loses a child to brain tumour and, as with many cancers, the incidence of brain tumour is rising. I very much hope that that will be taken on board by the new Minister, and he will hear more from me in future about the need to increase brain tumour research.

4.5 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Thank you for calling me in this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), and one benefit of this type of debate is that we learn something that we did not know before. I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who introduced the debate. I know that he has been a doughty campaigner, particularly on behalf of pancreatic cancer sufferers, since we were both elected, and the way he introduced the debate was fitting and appropriate. I also pass on my best wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and his family at this difficult time. It is a surprise not to see him in this Chamber for a debate such as this, but we understand the circumstances.

I want to start by paying tribute to Greg Lake, the rock star who, sadly, died yesterday after a long battle with cancer. To me, he was one of the icons. He founded King Crimson, and one of the first albums I bought was “In the Court of the Crimson King”. He then went on to form the supergroup Emerson, Lake and Palmer, and he also produced the iconic hit “I believe in Father Christmas”, which we hear at this time of year. I want to put that on the record because it is appropriate that we remember that people are suffering and dying as a result of cancer literally every day.

[Bob Blackman]

I declare my interest as chair of the all-party group on smoking and health, and I note that the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) raised a number of the issues set out in the briefing that has been circulated quite widely. I want, however, to build on some of the things that have taken place. One of the key recommendations of the UK cancer strategy, which was founded not a year ago, as the title of this debate suggests, but 18 months ago, was that the replacement tobacco control plan should be published within a year. The last tobacco control plan expired a year ago, and we were promised a replacement in the summer. I know that “the summer” can stretch, but stretching it to Christmas is a bit of a long stretch. We recently had an excellent debate in Westminster Hall, where we briefed the new Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), on all the key issues relating to tobacco control. She promised that the new plan would be published soon, and she did so again when I raised it with her at Health questions. It will not surprise today’s Minister to learn that the one thing I have to ask is to be given a date for the new plan—he should not tell me, “Soon”.

I now come to a significant fact. The Prime Minister said in her first major speech, on the steps of Downing Street, that she would be

“fighting against the burning injustice that, if you’re born poor, you will die on average nine years earlier than others.”

Smoking is responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between rich and poor in this country, so if we can cut smoking rates, we will help deliver the Prime Minister’s ambition. I ask the Minister to make sure that we get this tobacco control plan as quickly as possible.

We know that smoking is the greatest preventable cause of cancer worldwide. It accounts for more than one in four cancer deaths in the UK and for a fifth of all cancer cases. Smoking increases the risk of getting 14 other cancers and is responsible for more than 80% of cases of lung cancer—the cancer that is the biggest killer in this country. It also has the worst five-year survival rate. Therefore, from that perspective, if we can cut smoking, we will cut the causes of cancer.

I wish to declare an interest in this matter. As I have said in this place on more than one occasion, both of my parents died, in 1979, of smoking-related diseases. They both died of cancer because they smoked virtually every day of their lives. I heard the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse say that he gave up in 1980. I still remember those terrible days when my parents died, and I want us to get to a position where no one has to suffer what my family and I had to suffer.

**Rebecca Harris:** Does my hon. Friend agree that those Members who said that we should not bring in a ban on smoking in cars with children because it was unpoliceable may now regret that? Children are policing that measure very well indeed.

**Bob Blackman:** When the change in law came through, a number of people objected to it, saying that it would not be enforceable. I remember back to my childhood when both of my parents were smoking in the car in front of me. It was difficult then as a child to say,

“Please, will you not smoke, because I do not like it?” It was just easier to open the window. I do not want children to go through that. It is right and important that we changed the law in that way, as we know that second-hand smoke is a key killer of young lungs. It was a significant development—and a development that people did not think would happen. People did not think that we could introduce this change and get it through both Chambers, but I am delighted to say that we did it and that it was the right thing to do.

**Jo Churchill:** I thank my hon. Friend for providing such a powerful case. I could not agree with him more. To my way of thinking, banning smoking would do me, but we probably cannot go that far. Does he agree that the broader point of health economics is also important? Lung cancer is not the only issue. There is also emphysema, pulmonary disease and so on. If we sort out the tobacco issue, we could make much broader savings across the health service.

**Bob Blackman:** There are aspects of that with which I agree. The reality is that tobacco is the only product in the world, which, if used in the way that was intended, will kill us. Therefore, controlling it is vital.

We know as well that those with complex medical needs have the highest smoking rates. I am talking about people who are unemployed, who have mental health conditions, and who are in prison. I am also talking about the people whom I am championing at the moment—the homeless. All of them are much more likely to smoke than others, and they are also more likely to have the most health problems as a direct result. It is quite clear that the most disadvantaged members of society are more likely to smoke and therefore suffer cancer and other health-related problems as a result. Clearly, we need to take action. Quitting smoking reduces the likelihood of having cancer. It is also key that lungs can recover if one gives up smoking. We must encourage people to give up smoking and, more importantly, to try to prevent young people from ever starting. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) told us what happened to him as a five-year-old. I would not advocate that as a shock treatment. None the less, it is quite clear that stopping people starting to smoke is the best way forward, rather than trying to get them to give up later in life.

The recent report “Smoking Still Kills”, which was endorsed by no fewer than 129 organisations, recommended that, as a target, we should reduce adult smoking to less than 13% by 2020 and to 5% by 2035. I take the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill): that is not ambitious enough. We should be going for a smoke-free Britain, or, rather, a smoke-free United Kingdom. I must get my phraseology correct.

To achieve that target, we need mass media campaigns, which the Department of Health has ceased. We need stop-smoking services to be encouraged, promoted and funded across the UK, and local authorities should enforce the necessary activities and to do their job. We know that mass media campaigns are extremely effective and cost-effective in prompting people to stop smoking and in discouraging young people from starting. In 2009 we had funding of just under £25 million for anti-smoking campaigns, but by 2015—last year—that had been reduced to £5.3 million. That is a false economy.

If we had much better funding for mass media campaigns, I am sure we could reduce the incidence of smoking far more. Equally, we know that stop-smoking services across the UK have been highly effective in reducing smoking rates. Smokers are up to four times more likely to quit if they have support from specialist groups and smoking services, compared to quitting cold. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse referred to when he gave up smoking, and he can remember the time and the date when he did so. Most people who have smoked in their adult lives have difficulty giving up and they need help and support. We should ensure that that is available.

The sad fact is that right across the UK smoking cessation services are either having their funding reduced or being closed altogether. That is extremely regrettable. I suggested to the Chancellor that by putting just 5p on a packet of 20 cigarettes and using that money to fund smoking cessation services we could provide all the money that is needed to continue smoking cessation services across the United Kingdom. That, to me, would be a very sensible investment indeed.

Funding for trading standards has fallen from £213 million in 2010 to £124 million now; the teams have been cut to the bone and the number of staff working in trading standards has been reduced radically. That means fewer local controls to target illicit tobacco in the way we should, to prevent some very nasty products from being used by people across the United Kingdom. That is a retrograde step. We need to invest in those services to make sure that we deliver better health outcomes.

We desperately need a new tobacco control plan and programme so that we can see the radical targets that are needed and the investment required across the United Kingdom. We should be setting out our stall—we want a smoke-free United Kingdom not by 2035 or beyond, but by 2020 or 2025. We can achieve it with the right programme. The key point is that if we deliver this plan, we will cut the rate of cancer deaths and the number of people suffering from cancer, which will reduce the burden on the national health service and allow us to take that money from the health service to use on the more difficult cancers that colleagues have mentioned. Those cancers are difficult to spot, difficult to treat and need specialist drugs and specialist treatments.

**Henry Smith:** My hon. Friend is making the powerful point that if we reduce preventable cancers, we can redirect resources to the difficult cancers. It is a fact that more than 230,000 people in the United Kingdom suffer from blood cancers. As in the case of pancreatic cancer, which the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) mentioned, if we could better treat those difficult cancers with those resources, we could go so much further.

**Bob Blackman:** Clearly, the priority has to be to eliminate what we can eliminate. If people smoke, they put themselves at risk of cancer—as I said, 14 different cancers are affected by smoking. If people stop smoking, it eliminates that risk. Equally, through diet, people can eliminate some of the risks. However, there are cancers that are not affected by smoking or diet. Therefore, if we can reuse resources and concentrate on the detection or treatment of the more difficult cancers, the health of the nation must be improved.

I bring my remarks to a close by saying that I hope we will get an answer in a few minutes to the question we are all asking: may we please have a date—with a day, a month and a year—when we will get the tobacco control plan?

4.20 pm

**Jo Churchill** (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I, too, thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate. I also thank the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for the way he introduced it, which has allowed us to conduct it in the tone that we have.

I came to this place after a journey with this disease, but I have been amazed since I have been here. The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debonnaire) has fought the disease and now sits back in her place, and very welcome that is. The news about the hon. Member for Blyth Valley (Mr Campbell), too, is welcome. I have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) talk about his journey with the disease. My best wishes go to my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who is on the journey at the moment. It is unusual not to see my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) in the Chamber, and my thoughts and prayers go out to him and his wife at this time.

Cancer is interesting: you don't pick it, it picks you. We have heard from many Members that some cancers are preventable, but there are over 200 cancers. The debate often gets channelled towards rare diseases or prolific diseases such as breast cancer, prostate cancer or lung cancer—one of the big four. However, the debate we have had today is very broad, and I welcome that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) said we are doing better, which we are, but we could do even better, and I would like to return to the issue of research, which was brought up by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), to see how we might do better there.

I welcome the commitment to the strategy. Implemented, it could be transformational, which is why I hope we will hear about better implementation. The "Five Year Forward View" shows that funding for cancer services will go up by 9%, reaching £13 billion by 2020-21.

As we have heard, one in two of us will suffer from cancer by the end of this Parliament, and 2.5 million people in this country are living with the disease. A question the strategy does not necessarily address properly is how we will care for those people. How will we deal with the survivors affected by it—625,000 people will be, as was mentioned earlier—who will carry forward some form of disability or hardship from having the disease? How will we deal with palliative care? Have the sustainability and transformation plans looked into palliative care and how we can address the needs of people who are looking towards the end of their lives?

I would also like to highlight teenage cancers, although it is usually breast cancer that I talk about in this place. I have a young friend for whom a year on means something different. She wrote to me on Sunday, after I said I was talking in this debate. I thought of her because, on 11 December last year, young Emily was diagnosed with cancer.

[Jo Churchill]

She said:

“Last year in December I was diagnosed with ALL Leukaemia. It was a very scary time for me and my family. But something that makes going to hospital that little bit nicer is how lovely the nurses are.

However, there were a lot of horrid bits during the start of treatment, such as hair loss and sickness.

Although, I still have two years to go of treatment to go on treatment, it is a lot less intense now I am in maintenance. The majority of chemo is in tablet form at home, one hospital visit a month and the HORRID, HORRID steroids, also once a month for five days!

I know that the steroids work as one of the main chemo therapy treatment - but they make me put on weight, feel emotional for no reason and sometimes cross and angry at my mum, who is my absolute rock and is always there for me, so that makes me feel very sad!

If I could change anything about the chemo it would definitely be; to not feel sick and not take steroids!”

Emily is a year on in her journey. I am sure I can speak for everybody in wishing her lots of success for a great journey.

One of the best things we can do for young people is to educate them. Education is a theme that has come out of this debate. I will not go over the comments by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) about smoking, which they discussed so well, but merely say that education in that regard is important. Nor will I go over education around food and nutrition, which, as we have heard, is worked on by the Penny Brohn institute and The Haven.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned diet. Every oncologist I have ever had through all three of my journeys has spoken about the need to look after oneself through a good diet, keeping fit and exercise. We do our young people a disservice if we do not help them to lead better and healthier lives. I want to understand how the Minister is looking across Departments to make sure that this is addressed in the policies of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Transport through cycle paths, trim trails, and right across the piece so that we can all lead healthier lives.

I am pleased that the industry is responding by reducing adverts for children and so on, and I would like this to go further, but parents have a huge part to play in their children’s lives. We have a huge part to play in our own lives with regard to what we eat and how we make choices about whether we smoke or have that extra beer or extra pie. There is some self-responsibility involved. If the Minister will do his bit by helping to educate people a little more through public health information, I am sure that we will step up to the mark and do our bit as well.

I welcome the setting up of cancer alliances and the appointment of Cally Palmer, the excellent head of the cancer taskforce. Early diagnosis is fundamental, as the hon. Member for Scunthorpe pointed out, because it gives us better outcomes, but the Government must set out, with NHS England, how funding will be strategically allocated. For example, will we be able to use mobile diagnostics and molecular diagnostics? I note my interest as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on personalised medicine, and vice-chair of the cancer

APPG and the breast cancer APPG. If we could see who would benefit from the use of drugs, we would stop waste. For example, only 20% of women with breast cancer would benefit from Herceptin. Will the Minister address the point about the use of innovative technologies raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point?

How can we utilise the workforce in a more strategic approach? Macmillan, Cancer Research UK and 20 other organisations have developed eight principles on this. We need a workforce that is fit for the future, with people who understand the changing landscape that we are dealing with. I welcome the £130 million put into radiotherapy machines, but I would like to know that we have the radiographers who can work those machines and optimise their use.

More of us survive living with and beyond cancer, but metastatic cancer, in particular, is a type that we need to learn more about. That brings me on to the use of data. The Teenage Cancer Trust would welcome clinical trials with young people. There is a lack of data on metastatic breast cancer.

**Rebecca Harris:** My mother-in-law passed away from secondary metastatic breast cancer after opportunities to diagnose her were missed. It has been brought to my attention that we do not keep very good records or data on metastasized breast cancer. The cancer pathway does not provide a specialist nurse for those with breast cancer, and we do not seem to provide a specialist nurse for those with metastasized breast cancer, either.

**Jo Churchill:** I agree with my hon. Friend. People who are diagnosed with metastatic cancers—not only of the breast, but across the piece—feel like they are dropping through the cracks. They do not necessarily get a clinical nurse specialist, so that is another area for the specialist workforce to address. We need to make sure that we catch people on the journey, because it may be iterative. People may feel fit and well, but then find that they have to use the services again, so our approach needs to be flexible.

My hon. Friend has mentioned the importance of the ecosystem of research, hospitals and patients. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley works hard with the Bloodwise charity, which is truly emblematic of an empowering organisation that works with the patient, clinician and researcher to help drive understanding. That is one way of giving UK plc a huge advantage. The hon. Member for Strangford has said that we need to look at the ecosystem, which is not just about cancer treatment at the end, but about researchers, universities, those brilliant students and staff whom we welcome from Europe and everyone in the pharmaceutical industry and charities working collaboratively to get the best outcome possible. That is how we will start to rise up the table and be as good as Sweden and other countries whose patients have truly fantastic outcomes.

Timely interventions can help recovery. I want to understand how recovery packages are being rolled out, because the issue of the workforce is critical.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) has mentioned alternative therapies, which can be useful, but this is a space in which charities can help people. Only this week, the Countryside Alliance Foundation took women who have received treatment fly-fishing. They find that the experience of being outside, doing

something physical and enjoying nature gives them a huge sense of wellbeing. Personally, I do not think that it is a question of either/or; it is a question of joining them together.

Finally, I know that this is not the Minister's area, but I would like him to take it back with him. I welcome the cancer drugs fund, but I am worried about those who benefit from combined treatments. Melanoma Focus has said that people on combined treatments may be disadvantaged, because not all of them will have access to the cancer drugs fund. I hope that the fund will be flexible and that the matter will be addressed.

4.33 pm

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): Like all other hon. Members who have spoken, I welcome this very important debate, which was secured by the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) and others. Although he is, uncharacteristically, not in his place, for very important reasons—we all send him and his wife our very best wishes—I want to place it on the record that this House and, indeed, the whole country owe him a huge debt of gratitude for all that he does on the issue and for his sterling leadership as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on cancer in aiding our work in fighting this terrible disease.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who opened the debate. Like me and several others, he is a chair of an all-party group on cancer; his group is on pancreatic cancer. He works tirelessly on this issue, and he chaired the Britain against cancer conference with aplomb this week. He set the scene today so well, and his knowledge and passion shone through.

I thank all hon. Members who have spoken in the debate: the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), the hon. Members for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris)—the hon. Lady is also the chair of a cancer all-party group—the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) and my very good friend the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who is also vice-chair of the all-party group on breast cancer, of which I am a co-chair. They all made excellent contributions, and each and every one has made some important points about where we need to go next with the cancer strategy.

Much of the debate has focused on the report published by the all-party group on cancer, which looked at the progress made in implementing the cancer strategy one year on from its publication. The report makes many valid points and recommendations, and I look forward to hearing from the Minister on the specifics mentioned in it. The strategy can go a long way towards helping some of the estimated 2.5 million people living with cancer and the people who are diagnosed each year with cancer. The strategy, if implemented in full, could save 30,000 more lives per year by 2020.

That should be paired with the deeply worrying news that broke at the beginning of November that more than 130,000 patients a year have not been receiving cancer treatment on time, because cancer patients did not see a cancer specialist within the required 14 days. In some areas, the problem was so severe that more than

6,000 patients were forced to wait 104 days or more. In addition, our findings show that the Government met their 62-day target only once in the last 20 months. That should drive the Government to do more, and it is clear that we are seeing issues around the transformations already. That should not be knocked, and I am certainly not knocking it, but we must all continue to hold the Government to account where we can.

That is why in my contribution I want to touch on two areas: improvement in preventive measures that can help to reduce the occurrence of cancer, and the significant concerns that have recently been raised regarding the cancer workforce. We can all agree that prevention is key to addressing many health conditions, illnesses and diseases, and cancer is no different. As we have heard from several hon. Members in this debate, four in 10 cancers are preventable, and we should be doing much more to prevent cancers from developing, especially those that could have been prevented by lifestyle changes. Prevention was a central pillar of the cancer strategy, along with the five-year forward view.

The Minister is surely prepared for what I am going to say next, because I have said it to him often enough in my short time as the shadow Minister with responsibility for public health. It remains true, sadly. The false economy of cutting public health funding with no assessment of the ramifications of doing so on various aspects of our lives, or on other parts of the NHS and the wider health service, is seriously worrying. According to data collected by the Association of Directors of Public Health, smoking cessation services are expected to be reduced by 61% in 2016-17, with 5% of services completely decommissioned. For weight management support there will be a 52% reduction, with 12% being decommissioned. That is damning information when smoking and obesity are, as we have heard, two of the biggest preventable causes of cancer. We know that 100,000 people are dying each year from smoking-related diseases, including cancer.

It is right that the cancer strategy strongly recommended the introduction of a new tobacco control plan post haste and an ambitious plan for a smoke-free society by 2035, as has been outlined. We still have not seen the plan, despite being promised repeatedly over the last year that we would. I am sure that the Minister will give us further information on that in his response, and we all look forward to it. I hope that we see that plan sooner rather than later, and that hope has been echoed by several hon. Members from both sides of the House.

A continued delay will never be beneficial for our shared vision of a smoke-free society or for preventing cancer from happening. Another plan we have finally seen, although it has been considerably watered down, is the one for childhood obesity. After smoking, it is understood that obesity is the next biggest preventable cause of cancer. If we allow current trends to continue, there could be more than 670,000 additional cases of cancer by 2035. This completely goes against the vision set out in the cancer strategy. We saw some of the detail of the sugary drinks levy earlier this week, and it will be interesting to see how this develops in the months ahead, but I hope the Minister can outline a little bit more about what else he and his colleagues plan to do on obesity and its links to cancer.

As part of the cancer strategy, a review of the current workforce was called for so that we could fully understand the shortfalls—the areas of investment needed and the

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

gaps in the training of new and existing NHS staff—and meet the ambitious and noble goals set out in the strategy. In my capacity as chair of the all-party group on ovarian cancer and co-chair of the all-party group on breast cancer, I along with colleagues from both sides of the House—some of them are in the Chamber, notably the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds, who is a vice-chair of the all-party group on breast cancer—raised this at the beginning of the year with Health Education England, which is conducting the review. In our letter, we raised the need for immediate solutions to fill the specialist gaps in our cancer workforce, but also the need for a strategic, longer-term solution to be put in place.

The issue of the cancer workforce is an incredibly important one, especially given that Cancer Research UK warned over two weeks ago that pathology services in the UK were at a tipping point, and that the Royal College of Radiologists warned earlier in the year that 25% of NHS breast screening programmes were understaffed, with 13% of consultant breast radiologist posts left vacant, a figure that has doubled since 2010. That should spur on the Department to push ahead on the workforce issues that have been raised so often with Ministers.

Only this July, organisations such as Macmillan and Cancer Research UK joined with other organisations to call for a set of principles to be taken up by the Government, including a review of the current and future workforce. The Minister should also heed the words of Dr Harpal Kumar, who during an oral evidence session for the inquiry by the all-party group on cancer into progress on the implementation of the review, said that workforce issues remained “significant and severe”.

The ageing population, which means that more and more people could be diagnosed with cancer, and the much welcomed push to improve earlier diagnosis of cancer mean that pressures on the workforce will rise if the right support is not found, especially given the projection that 500,000 Britons will be diagnosed with cancer by 2035. That should remain at the forefront of the Minister’s mind, and in the minds of his officials and those who deal with workforce capacity.

It is clear that investment is failing to keep up with demand. That was raised in the cancer strategy, which called on NHS England to invest to unlock the extra capacity we need to meet the higher levels of cancer testing. The Opposition support the calls made only a few short months ago by the national cancer advisory group for NHS England’s cancer transformation board to prioritise a focus on the cancer workforce in the coming months. I hope the Minister will ensure that that happens, and that when we come back from the Christmas recess, we will start to see the much needed progress that has been called for.

In conclusion, the work that has started on the transformative programme is to be welcomed. It is a large task to undertake, yet the Government will not be allowed to sit back; I know that they and the Minister will not do so. It is up to all of us in this House, along with many people outside this place, to continue to do all we can to hold the Minister and the Government to account on what are such important and personal matters for all of us who have been affected by cancer, be it

personally or through family and friends. We must all be critical friends in this drive to fight off cancer once and for all. We all agree that cancer should be at the top of our list of health priorities. It is so destructive, and, very sadly, it will affect us all in some way. We must ensure that we get this right, because we cannot afford to get it wrong.

4.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (David Mowat):** It is a pleasure to respond to this really important debate. I, too, would like to start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). I wish him and his wife the best in the journey they are on. I have been in this job a few months now and he has been extremely diligent in coming to see me and talking to me to ensure that cancer is, as it should be, right at the top of my radar screen. He also organised, with the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), an excellent Britain against Cancer event on Tuesday, which was attended by 400 people.

What has happened to my hon. Friend and his family reinforces what we all know: cancer affects us all. One person is diagnosed with cancer every two minutes. During the course of this debate, 100 people will have received a cancer diagnosis in England. That shows how important the issue is and how we need to make progress. There are a lot of chairs of all-party groups in the Chamber and all Members have spoken from a lot of personal knowledge and experience. I will not have time to respond in detail to every point raised.

I will start by making a generic point that this debate and others like it remind us that our health service is not principally about bricks and mortar. Survival rates are far more important. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe gave a very fair and reasonable introduction to the debate in terms of what the priorities ought to be. On a typical day, when I walk across the Chamber and the Lobby about two Members will talk to me about their concerns in relation to some aspect of hospital reconfiguration or A&E downgrades and so on. Those are fair concerns, which we all need to be concerned about in our own patches. However, I am not accosted by Members saying they are concerned that their clinical commissioning group has lower than average survival rates. Over time, we need to learn to think about them, too. We have not talked about this in any detail, but the Government have published four indicators that rank every clinical commissioning group in the country. The news was not brilliant when it came out, but that transparency is very powerful. We all ought to get used to this being as important to our constituents—arguably more so—than some of the bricks and mortar concerns that we tend to spend our time on.

As I said, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe was fair. I think the phrase he used was that a lot has been done, but that more needs to happen. I think all Members would probably agree with that. A lot of good things are being done. Our one-year, five-year and 10-year survival rates are all improving for all cancer types. What we have learned in this debate is that we talk about aggregate cancer survival rates, but there are very large variabilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) made a very good point with regard to brain tumours having a 19% five-year survival rate, against a target for all cancer types of

70%. That is absolutely true. One of the themes of the debate has been that we are making less progress on some rarer cancer types and we need to do better.

We are making progress on early diagnosis. There are eight cancer targets and we are now meeting seven of them. As Members have pointed out, however, not least the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) who speaks for the Opposition, one very important cancer target is not being met: the 62-day target. The strategy needs to drive and develop that and we need to work harder.

We have been reminded that, in spite of the progress made, we are not, by any means, the best in the world at this. We are not even the best in Europe. Indeed, there is evidence that we are below the average in Europe for most cancer types. It is fair to say that we are catching up in many cases but not in all. In particular, we are not closing the gap with the rest of Europe on lung cancer, which several hon. Members have talked about. We need to be aware of that and focus on it.

As I said on Tuesday at the conference, when I started this role I was struck by the discovery that we had had five cancer strategies in the last 20 years. We can deduce two things from that: first, this is a cross-party issue—all Governments do cancer strategies—and secondly, and more importantly, we do not need another strategy. We do not need more ideas about what we need to do; instead, we need to deliver, with a strong focus, the 96 points set out in the cancer strategy and drive them through over its final four years. We need to make that happen.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West used a very good phrase when she said we must be “critical friends” in this process, and so we must. Every Member, despite their having different perspectives, needs to support Cally and her team in driving this strategy through. My role is to ensure clear accountability around what is being done, by when and by whom, and to ensure that we have milestones, targets and deliverables. Frankly, though, we have some way to go before we get that as clear as it needs to be. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay has pointed out to me several times that we need to focus on output measures, not on process and input measures, and that, too, is true. It is something we could make work better.

In the strategy, there are six programmes of work, including on prevention, early diagnoses, commissioning, high-quality modern services and, importantly, patient experience and living well beyond cancer. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) made some very good points about the overall approach. This is not just a technical matter; we need to get better on patient experience and living beyond cancer. I spoke at an event organised by the all-party group on ovarian cancer. At that event, I met a lady who had been given a prognosis of six months to live, and she told me that she had no support in terms of an ongoing dialogue with a clinical nurse—that clearly is a failure and completely inadequate. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) talked about clinical nurses. Our response, through the strategy, is to put in place cancer recovery packages for everyone with a diagnosis. That is important, although the point was well made about the staffing implications. We need to address that as well, and we will.

A point was made about rarer cancers, particularly brain and blood cancers. We need to make more progress more quickly on research, as we do not have as many answers on those cancers as on others. I am talking not just about research by the Government, but about Cancer Research UK and the other charities. As several colleagues said, the voluntary sector is extremely important, and of course it is. Macmillan, Marie Curie, Cancer Research UK, plus the hundreds of small charities in our constituencies, make a big difference.

We also know that the workforce matters. This is a consistent stream in the strategy and something that it needs to get right.

I was asked by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe in his opening comments how we are holding Health Education England to account on the workforce requirements. I meet Professor Cummings regularly, as does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, not just on this aspect of the workforce but on other related responsibilities, such as increasing the number of GPs working in primary practice.

We need to make progress quickly on certain issues. We know that we do not have enough radiographers, for example. The point was made that there is no point in having linear accelerators if we do not have people to work them. That is right, but let us at least be grateful for, and pleased about, the fact that we are now rolling out the linear accelerators that Simon Stevens announced this week at 15 locations in all parts of our country. Endoscopy has been a real area of shortage, and it has been called out as a specific work stream within the 96 aspects of the cancer strategy. We will have 200 extra endoscopists trained by 2020, 40 of whom are already in place, and we will continue to build on that. Workforce generally is of massive importance.

I have not answered all the questions and points raised in the debate. I have not so far talked about the tobacco control plan. Several Members mentioned this issue. All I can say now, I am afraid, is that it will happen soon. That is the answer. The relevant Minister has informed me that she is determined to get this right, and I guess we can all agree that getting it right is indeed important. I am probably as disappointed as some Members that the process of the strategy is not as developed as we would like, but let me say that we are doing a lot on smoking by placing explicit images on packages and that type of thing. We are doing more than many other countries on that, and we should not forget it. It is not all about strategy.

I am about to finish, but I will say that we need to come back to this debate in a year's time. I hope that the Backbench Business Committee and the chairmen of all the cancer all-party groups will make sure that we have a debate in this place every year about the cancer strategy, so that the Government can be held to account by critical friends. We all need to make sure that we focus on getting this strategy delivered. We absolutely do not need another strategy until 2020, and we will have made massive potential steps forward if we achieve what we have set out.

**David Tredinnick:** My hon. Friend tempts me by saying that he is about to sit down with three minutes to go. May I come to see him to discuss the announcement of the £200 million for support services?

**David Mowat:** I would be happy to speak to my hon. Friend about that. He made the point that there was no investment in a number of areas. I was briefed that we are putting in £5 million to the two Haven centres that are being put together. I would be happy to speak to my hon. Friend about the £200 million, although I did not agree with every point he made. At this point, I will sit down.

4.58 pm

**Nic Dakin:** I thank the Minister for his response to what he was right to say has been a very good debate among critical friends, to steal the excellent point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and the hon. Members for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) and for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) all highlighted the importance of public health measures, and particularly smoking cessation campaigns, in preventing cancer. We are reassured that we will have the plan “soon”.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith), who is the chair of the all-party group on blood cancer, spoke movingly from personal experience about how blood cancers thunder into people’s lives unexpectedly. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who is chair of the all-party group on brain tumours, echoed that in much that she said about the need to do something about these cancers that are stuck. She reminded us that brain cancer is the biggest killer of young people, and she was right to say that although the cancer strategy is a strong step in the right direction, we need to do more. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) echoed the point that we need to do even better. As the hon. Member for Bosworth said, if we have moved from 60% to 70%, why not to 80%? The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), a cancer survivor herself, posed a series of very challenging questions—exactly the sort of questions that should drive better performance as we move forward.

We are at a pivotal moment for the cancer services. I know that many people will be heartened by the Minister’s comments both today and on Tuesday, at the Britain against Cancer event. He was right to say that it is easy to write strategies, but now is the time to deliver.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Cancer Strategy one year on.

## Business without Debate

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Monday 12 December, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Damian Green relating to the Welfare Cap not later than ninety minutes after their commencement; such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—*(Heather Wheeler.)*

## Governance of the BBC

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*(Heather Wheeler.)*

5 pm

**Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con):** On 7 October, *The Sun* released a video of the gymnast Louis Smith and friends having fun at the expense of Islamic prayer practices. This unleashed a torrent of venom in the media and beyond, with Louis Smith being widely denounced as Islamophobic. The sensationalist reporting of his actions in some sections of the media resulted in the gymnast’s receiving multiple death threats.

The BBC has a rich heritage of aiming both excoriating and gentle humour in the direction of Christianity over the past 40 years. We have had Dave Allen, Monty Python and the Vicar of Dibley, and I particularly remember “Not the Nine O’Clock News”, in the early 1980s, taking the Church of England to task for its views on homosexuality. So, given its proud tradition of tackling religious sensibilities, one could be forgiven for thinking that the BBC would inject some common sense and balance into the reporting of Louis Smith’s actions. Not a bit of it: instead of trying to insert itself between Louis Smith and the mob, the corporation placed itself firmly at the head of the mob.

On 13 October, during a radio interview on Radio 5 live, the BBC talk show host Emma Barnett irresponsibly painted Louis Smith as both Islamophobic and a racist, defining “phobic” as

“sort of hateful or it can mean mimicking or it can be taking the mickey”.

She went on to describe Louis Smith’s actions as “very, very offensive” and “shameful”.

Ms Barnett is clearly as unfamiliar with the Oxford English Dictionary as she is with the BBC’s output of the past 40 years. In condemning Louis Smith as “phobic” for taking the “mickey” out of faith, she has placed a question mark over the motives and legacy of some of the UK’s greatest deceased and living comedians. Now, I recognise that Louis Smith is never going to be the world’s greatest comedian, but we—and the BBC—should be blind to that fact, because the law applies as much to gymnasts as it does to joke-tellers.

More worrying than Ms Barnett’s ignorance over the law and her employer’s heritage was her failure to condemn the multiple death threats that Louis Smith had received. Having put the question and received the answer, at no point did she intervene to say that those death threats were wrong and entirely unjustifiable. She had eight immediate opportunities to do that, and a further 23 throughout the remainder of the interview. None of those opportunities was taken.

Having heard the interview, I took the view that the BBC had been unbalanced in its approach to Louis Smith, with the inquisitorial tone of the interview heightening the already significant threat to his wellbeing and safety. I was also concerned that the BBC was once again promoting the narrative that all British Muslims are thin-skinned and easily offended. I raised my concerns in writing with the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, and Rona Fairhead, the chairman of the BBC Trust.

The response that I received from those three figures of authority was disappointing. The Secretaries of State delegated their reply to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Digital and Culture, who will be responding to this debate. In an anodyne letter sent to me on 18 November, he said that

“responsibility for what is broadcast rests with the broadcasters and organisations which regulate broadcasting.”

That is, of course, absolutely correct, but what was evident in his letter was a complete unwillingness on the Government’s part even to engage with the subject of my concerns, which, at their core, centred on the hounding of a young man for exercising a form of speech that was entirely protected in law by section 29J of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. Perhaps the Government felt that in view of the sensitivities surrounding the subject area, it was all too difficult publicly to champion the principles of UK law. Instead they breezily stated that:

“It is a long-standing principle that the Government do not interfere in programme matters, either on arrangements for scheduling or on content. It is important to maintain the principle of freedom of expression which political interference could undermine.”

Like the Minister, I am very pro-freedom of expression, but he seems blind to my concern that the BBC, while benefiting from our country’s wonderful protections and traditions, seeks to belittle and denigrate others, such as Louis Smith, for the temerity to expect that the same rights and courtesies should extend to them.

Having taken up my concerns with the BBC, I received a letter from its director-general, Tony Hall, with an attached note of investigation prepared by Rozina Breen, head of news at Radio 5 live. The response is both tone deaf and rather chilling. In relation to my concern about the failure of Emma Barnett, the interviewing journalist, to condemn those issuing Louis Smith with death threats, I was told:

“Death threats are widely understood to be unacceptable in our society and we don’t believe it was therefore necessary for Emma Barnett to condemn the reported death threats, on air as you suggest.”

That is a simply stunning response. Yes, death threats are widely known to be a bad thing, but clearly in the case of Louis Smith this message had yet to penetrate into the consciousness of those calling for him to be killed. Perhaps, therefore, having painted him as Islamophobic, the BBC may have felt some obligation to strike a note of cautionary balance in Louis Smith’s favour. It obviously felt otherwise.

Even more grotesquely, in response to my concerns that the interview had further endangered Louis Smith’s life, Ms Breen of the BBC stated that:

“I can’t accept that this interview endangered Mr Smith’s well-being. If anything, by allowing him an opportunity to make his apologies to a very large audience, the interview might have served to demonstrate the sincerity of his apologies and appease people who might be angry with him.”

That is a breath-taking statement. Setting aside the fact that Louis Smith had nothing to apologise for, I want to focus on the BBC’s belief that its interview allowed Louis Smith the opportunity to

“appease people who might be angry with him.”

I am sorry, but this looks a lot like the BBC congratulating itself on allowing Louis Smith the opportunity to beg

for his life. I hope I am wrong in this analysis but, whatever the denials offered up by the BBC, I fear that I am right.

The BBC is a public service broadcaster funded by a public use tax. It has a duty to be balanced and measured in its reporting and news output. In the case of Louis Smith, it was not. The real story that the BBC missed, or chose not to report, was the hounding of a man simply for finding humour in religion.

In this whole sorry affair the only person who is deserving of an apology is Louis Smith himself. He is owed an apology from the Muslim Council of Britain for its ridiculous overplaying of Muslim sensitivities towards their faith, for having toured the radio and television studios to be publicly humiliated and smeared, and for having missed his Olympic homecoming parade to visit mosques. The Muslim Council of Britain said that the apology issued by Louis Smith

“falls well short of addressing the hurt caused against Muslims”. What uncharitable nonsense from an organisation that strives to be taken seriously.

Having helped ensure the humiliation of Louis Smith and his banning from his sport, Harun Khan, the secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain, tweeted:

“Louis Smith already regretted his action and all good now. No one asked for a ban. Let’s work towards developing great sportspeople.”

This faux act of magnanimity would have been genuine and carried real weight if stated on day one of the story, and not, as was the case, after the humiliation was complete.

In relation to his ban, Louis Smith is owed an apology from British Gymnastics for its cowardly decision to suspend him for a period of two months—a decision that aligns this organisation firmly with the bullies and the name-callers.

Turning to our public service broadcaster once again, Louis Smith is owed an apology by the BBC and Emma Barnett for the callous and cruel treatment they subjected him to, providing a bear pit environment where he was ruthlessly painted as Islamophobic. The BBC’s conduct in this matter was both wicked and irresponsible. It might also like to reflect on its wider conduct in the way that it represents the Muslim community. It always seems to favour the loud and angry voices of the fringe over those with a self-confident, relaxed and gentle tone.

Finally, Louis Smith is owed an apology by the Government. In his hours, days and weeks of need, Ministers were nowhere to be seen. Even if the Government find the idea of British values too nebulous a concept to get their head around, they could at the very least have pointed out that Louis Smith’s actions were entirely protected and catered for in UK law. As I have said, the law in relation to the ridicule of faith is here for all of us, not just for comedians. I warn the Minister that many will construe the Government’s silence in the matter of Louis Smith as one which heralds, de facto, the reintroduction of an unwritten blasphemy law, enforced by threat and thuggery.

Sadly, I suspect that there is more chance of *The Sun* newspaper reflecting on its actions and admitting that it could have handled things better than the hubristic BBC doing so. The hounding of Louis Smith has shamed

[Mr Charles Walker]

our public service broadcaster, as it has shamed our nation and its laws. In our liberal and open society, freedom of worship marches hand in hand with the freedom to lampoon religion. Quite simply, that is the deal.

5.11 pm

**The Minister for Digital and Culture (Matt Hancock):**

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) for securing the debate, and for his dogged pursuit of justice and reasonableness on behalf of his constituent. The case he has raised has at its heart the question of how best to protect free speech and how our national institutions support both free speech and tolerance of others. He has put his case characteristically eloquently and powerfully.

The Government's view is that the treatment that Mr Smith received on social media and elsewhere was wholly and deeply unacceptable. I am very sorry that Mr Smith received death threats and threats of violence, which are not only unacceptable but potentially illegal, whether made online or offline. We have seen cases, including several involving Members of Parliament, of online threats that were potentially illegal. In some cases, they have been found to be illegal, and those findings are based on existing law, in which it is immaterial whether a threat is made online or offline. Threats of violence are just as illegal online as they are offline.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last month at Prime Minister's questions:

"We value freedom of expression and freedom of speech in this country—that is absolutely essential in underpinning our democracy—but we also value tolerance of others and tolerance in relation to religions."—[*Official Report*, 2 November 2016; Vol. 616, c. 888.]

It is a historic principle that people should have that freedom of expression, and it is of course right that with that freedom comes the responsibility to recognise the importance of tolerance towards others. We should all acknowledge and welcome the fact that Mr Smith has apologised for any offence caused, as my hon. Friend said.

Freedom of expression operates within a framework. The freedom to offend, whether wise or not, is a vital part of freedom of expression, but the freedom to threaten violence is not.

That brings me to role of the BBC. It is an important part of our constitutional settlement that the Government do not comment on the way the BBC, or indeed any other news outlet, reports individual stories, for the very good reason that it is operationally and editorially independent—so I am going to resist the temptation to do that now, just as I did in my earlier correspondence with my hon. Friend. I will say, however, that the right to freedom of speech—and with it the right to mock and poke fun—is something that the BBC itself holds very dear in its own content, as many Members of the House know only too well. Indeed, the mocking of our institutions, our politicians and our religions is a very BBC thing. There was "That Was the Week That Was" and "Spitting Image". My hon. Friend mentioned "The Vicar of Dibley" and I mention it, too. The BBC even named a brilliant show after mocking whole weeks. Our love of mockery is very British, and long may it be so.

The right to mock is of course balanced by a responsibility to be reasonable and restrained, but it is a right that we should uphold.

The process of the BBC charter review, which formally concluded this week, addressed the question of how the BBC should respond to concerns and complaints. The current model, based on the BBC Trust, is widely agreed not to work, so we have sought to improve and streamline how the BBC deals with complaints to ensure that it is clearly answerable to the people who pay for it, should they think that the BBC has failed in its duty of due accuracy and impartiality. The new charter will introduce two changes: a simpler overall complaints system; and external regulatory oversight of complaints made on editorial matters. In the first instance, the BBC will handle complaints about editorial things, and it is right that the broadcaster should deal with complaints about its own conduct to start with. The new charter will therefore give the BBC's new unitary board responsibility for how the BBC deals with complaints before any appeals are made to Ofcom. The new board will be chaired by a non-executive director and will comprise a majority of non-executive members, ensuring that the BBC is properly held to account for the way it deals with complaints.

As a whole, the changes that the Government have made to the BBC's governance will mean that the BBC is better governed and more accountable to the people who pay for it. In designing the new governance structure, we wanted to be clear that the day-to-day editorial decision making must rest with the director-general as the editor-in-chief, but the director-general will also be directly accountable to the new BBC board. That strikes the right balance between the director-general as the editor-in-chief and the new board, which sets the editorial standards and guidelines.

In cases where a complainant is unsatisfied with the BBC's response, or where the BBC fails to respond in a timely manner, the complainant will for the first time then be able to complain to Ofcom. Ofcom may, in exceptional circumstances, intervene at an earlier stage to handle and resolve a relevant complaint that has not been resolved by the BBC. Ofcom will be able to consider relevant complaints about all BBC content. While I acknowledge that my hon. Friend is not at all happy with how the BBC dealt with this case, Ofcom is well placed to take on this new regulatory role.

Beyond the specifics of individual editorial decisions or cases, there is of course an important wider point to reflect on: how broadcasters deliver their news content with due impartiality. Ofcom is currently consulting on its proposed approach for regulating BBC editorial content. This is the first in a series of consultations that Ofcom is publishing as it prepares for its new BBC duties.

I am of the view that the role that our public service broadcasters, and other responsible news providers, take in presenting the news with due accuracy and due impartiality is increasingly important. We have a broad and fragmented news environment, including print, broadcast, classic websites and social media. The way in which news is generated and shared has changed enormously over the past decade. My hon. Friend's example is a case in point, owing to the interaction between social media and mainstream media. The emergence of the citizen journalist who, at best, can truly democratise news provision and reflect unfolding events in real time is an important development.

The plethora of news sites now available allows curious and interested consumers a wealth of sources to interrogate but, as we are all aware, this is not a wholly positive picture. For each site that takes a responsible attitude toward news provision, others do not. Added to that, the use of social media as a main source through which news is consumed is increasing, particularly so for young adults, meaning that context may be lost and that consumers may be less clear about the source of news they are reading. The ability of social media users to share news content along with their comments on that content—both positive and negative—becomes an integral part of the way that news is consumed.

All of that makes the role of our broadcasters in providing trusted, reasonable and impartial news all the more important. It is right, as this debate suggests, that we look to the BBC—and to other broadcast news

outlets—to uphold the highest standards in its coverage. We must ensure broadcasters have the confidence to broadcast fairly, impartially and accurately, based on values of free speech and tolerance that we hold dear.

I hope that in responding in this way, in changing the way the BBC is regulated and in underlining in this House the importance of freedom of speech and the value that we attach to that freedom not only to speak, but to mock and, in some cases, to offend, we are demonstrating that the age-old principle of freedom of speech is alive and well. We must continue to do the work of upholding it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.20 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Thursday 8 December 2016

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

## Post-study Work Schemes

1.30 pm

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Scottish Affairs Committee of Session 2015-16, Post-study work schemes, HC 593, and the Government response, HC 787.

Mr Rosindell, it is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship in this short debate on the Scottish Affairs Committee's report about post-study work schemes for Scotland. One of the first things that we did after I assumed the Chair of the Committee, which is obviously a pleasure and a privilege, was to go to Scotland and ask the people of Scotland, regular contributors to the Committee's work and other stakeholders what they wanted from the Committee. I felt that was the right thing to do, and I think colleagues on the Committee who are here today found that a valuable and worthwhile session. It helped us to create a report about the Committee's work and decide what work we would undertake during this Parliament.

One key theme that emerged, and that people stressed to us that they were really keen for us to debate and discuss, was the prospect of a post-study work scheme for Scotland. We would expect the higher education sector to say that, and of course it did, but we also heard clear representations from business, trade unions and practically every sector in Scotland. We therefore decided to publish a report on post-study work schemes, and we are pleased that it has received so much attention in Scotland.

During our inquiry, the Committee heard from Universities Scotland, the UK Council for International Student Affairs, Colleges Scotland, the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the Institute of Directors, the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Scottish Government, and the Immigration Minister himself and his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland. Essentially, we heard a practical chorus of overwhelming support for the reintroduction of a dedicated post-study work scheme for Scotland. The only discordant voices in that general chorus of desire for such a scheme to return were those of the man who has his hand up—the Immigration Minister—and his colleague the Secretary of State for Scotland. Everywhere else we went, every submission that we secured and every piece of evidence that we heard during the many sessions that we had on this issue very much supported the idea that Scotland should have a dedicated post-study work scheme to retain our international students.

It is perhaps fortuitous that we are having this debate the week after the Committee published our report "Demography of Scotland and the implications for devolution," which I very much recommend to the House. The Committee is particularly pleased with the report, as it offers a fascinating snapshot of the population

and demographic trends in Scotland. Essentially, it concludes that Scotland's population is growing, which practically everyone in Scotland welcomes. Population growth could not make the Immigration Minister more miserable when he gets his figures for the rest of the United Kingdom, but in Scotland we welcome it and recognise it as a key factor in our economic growth and wellbeing.

Some of our findings in that report are interesting and pertinent to this debate. There are troughs and spikes in Scotland's population. One of the peaks is among 17 to 19-year-olds, among whom there is immigration to Scotland. The Committee interpreted that as people coming to Scotland to be educated because of our wonderful higher education sector. Our universities are world-class; three of them are in the top 100. However, the Committee was somewhat concerned by the trough in 22 to 25-year-olds, among whom there is not immigration but emigration. People at that critical age, who are at the start of their working careers and could make a real contribution to Scotland's economy and wellbeing, are actually leaving Scotland. That worried us. The Committee interpreted that as students who we had educated to a high standard in our wonderful universities leaving the nation of Scotland. We found it hard to understand why on earth we would open our doors to international students who wanted to come to Scotland and enjoy the experience of being there, educate them to a high standard, and then boot them out. We found that very difficult to comprehend.

Let me outline the current situation and conditions in Scotland. In 2014-15, there were 29,210 non-EU international students enrolled in Scottish higher education institutions, representing 12.6% of the total higher education student population. In 2013-14, the last year for which we have figures, fees from non-EU international students made up 12.5% of the total income of Scottish HEIs. It is hard to get economic assessments, but it has been estimated that non-EU international students contribute more than £400 million in off-campus expenditure, which obviously benefits the many towns and cities that have a wonderful university as part of their community.

That financial contribution is obviously welcome—it was welcomed by practically everyone we spoke to—but my colleagues on the Committee will remember clearly that when we visited Aberdeen and were hosted by the University of Aberdeen, it was stressed to us that although that was great, those international students also enriched our college and university campuses with their experiences from different nations and made those campuses multicultural and multinational. Learning alongside students from all around the world gives indigenous Scottish students a fantastic experience. Universities Scotland stressed to us that that was as important as international students' financial contribution.

Non-EU students currently study in Scotland on general tier 4 student visas. Under the conditions of that visa, those students can study and work while they are in Scotland, but critically, they have four months to find secure employment after they complete their course or they have to leave the United Kingdom. It seems that the only available route for students to try to secure employment is the route between tier 4 and tier 2—a route that was described to us by employers' organisations, trade unions and industry representatives as complicated, tortuous and almost impossible for some employers to

[Pete Wishart]

secure. To be eligible for that route, graduates must have completed their course and have a job offer with a salary of at least £20,800 from an employer that is licensed to sponsor a tier 2 visa. Employers' organisations told us that that was cumbersome and burdensome and some employers did not even bother trying, because they knew that it would be a tortuous process.

That £20,800 minimum salary for a tier 2 visa applies right across the UK; it makes no difference whether you are in London, Inverness or Northern Ireland. It may be possible for a 22-year-old in London to get a graduate entry-level salary of £20,800, but that is almost impossible for a new graduate in Scotland to secure. We see that in the evidence. We found during our inquiry that tier 2 sponsors are mainly in London and the south-east; in 2013, 63% of them were located there, compared with only 6% in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for giving way. He will recall that one of the key parts of the evidence that the Committee heard was Scottish universities themselves saying that when they take on some postgraduate employees, they do not pay them £20,800 a year. Even they are not able to retain the very best of the staff they train.

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely spot on. The Committee took issue with the idea that £20,800 is somehow applicable to the Scottish situation. I will come back to that point, but first I will make a few other remarks about how we could resolve this general situation.

In the past, we had a dedicated post-study work scheme in Scotland—the famous Fresh Talent initiative, which ran so successfully between 2005 and 2008. It was initiated by the former Labour First Minister Jack McConnell and had the overwhelming support of the Home Office down here. I still meet students in Perth who studied at the University of the Highlands and Islands who are products of Fresh Talent and are now making an incredible contribution to my community and constituency. Fresh Talent was subsumed into the general tier 1 post-study work visa scheme that ran from 2008 to 2012. Although that was still a post-study work scheme, it ended Scotland's advantage in being able to secure and keep international students. We did not mind that as long as we still had some means to secure international students who wanted to remain in Scotland. It was only with the election of a Conservative-led Government in 2010 that we saw the beginnings of the end of any dedicated post-study work scheme.

I will try to understand the Government's motives for all that. In the response to us, they said that the scheme was apparently "too generous". I would hazard a guess—perhaps I am out of place here—that that is something to do with the Government having almost an obsession with immigration numbers, and that their general desire to get immigration down from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands was behind the idea of closing any notion of a post-study work scheme. International students were an easy target—of course they were—and we could see where they were coming from. Everything has to be done through the book—in order to secure international students, universities and higher education institutions have to go through a complicated process.

It was so easy to close those routes and, instead of doing the hard work about illegal immigration, target the students. However, targeting students was a singularly self-defeating initiative. The people we want to stop coming into the country and staying here are the most educated—those we spent a fortune on—who want to stay in our country.

Of course, a lot of things were said about what the Government did. The Scottish Affairs Committee, before I assumed the Chair, did a report about that and warned of the consequences, as did the Select Committee on Home Affairs, of which I believe you were a member in those days, Mr Rosindell. Those reports said that there would be consequences and an impact, and an impact there has been. One thing the Committee was keen to discover and determine was what sort of impacts the closure of that route had had on Scotland, and the clear message we got from practically everyone was that the impact has been significant, negative and stark.

We cannot get a proper picture because the evidence is patchy, so the only thing we could look at was migration from tier 4 to tier 2, but we were able to estimate that there has been a fall-away of 80% in international students continuing to work in Scotland after their studies. That has had an immense adverse impact on our access to talent, and it has resulted in increased skills shortages in all key sectors the length and breadth of the Scottish economy.

More than that, there is the disincentive value of not having a particular route. We heard again and again from representatives of the education sector that Scottish universities are now losing out in the race to secure international talent from across the world. We are moving into a different type of working environment in the ability to share and transfer knowledge. The knowledge economy will be so important to economic growth as we go forward, and Scotland is in a great position because of the quality of our universities and the research done in Scotland, but we are now told that there is a massive disincentive to coming to Scotland.

Students sitting in, say, India, Australia or Kenya, and looking at the UK will be hearing all this stuff about Brexit and the splendid isolationism that the UK seems to want to be part of. If they are hearing that all the debate about leaving the European Union was about immigration and people not being welcome, they are not going to be particularly inclined to seek out a university in Scotland, as part of the United Kingdom, to come to and study. They will be thinking, "What on earth would I go there for, when I would be made most unwelcome and probably get booted out the minute I finish my course?"

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a real risk that we will lose competitive advantage to other Commonwealth and English-speaking nations such as Canada and Australia because of these restrictive rules? The University of Glasgow has expressed exactly the concerns he highlights and we all have constituency examples of those. I had a constituent who was literally a rocket scientist who was determined to work here and the UK Government's visa restrictions meant that she could not.

**Pete Wishart:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. We all have examples of that, and it is utterly depressing that we are booting out young people

of supreme ability and talent whom we have spent a fortune educating and who have such potential to add to our community. I come to his important point about the options that are available. We are obviously an Anglophone country—we have had the English language since Gaelic, and I know that he is keen on that particular issue—but there are now options in Canada, Australia and the United States. I know the Minister, when he addresses us, will tell us that there is still growth in international students. Yes, I concede that there is still growth in the number of international students coming to Scottish universities, but it is just 1%. Growth in Canada, Australia and the US is 8% to 11%, so we are obviously falling behind.

What we conclude is that the current post-study work routes do not meet the needs of Scotland, and by quite a margin. To try to be helpful to the Minister—we thought we were being helpful, anyway—we suggested doing a few minor things, which would not upset anybody, to tweak and improve the current situation. We started from the minor tweaks and moved through to suggesting a stand-alone post-study work scheme for Scotland—we looked at all the options available.

There are things that the Government could do so readily and easily without destroying their reputation for immigration obsession. For example, they could extend the length of time to find a tier 4 job. Why is that four months? What reason is there for that? They could create some bridge to enable students to move from tier 4 to tier 2, because all of a sudden they are at a cliff edge where, if they have not got a job or a sponsor, they are out. They could give people help to try to find a job. Then there is the issue of a regional salary. The minimum salary is set at £20,800. That does not work for Scotland—it is almost impossible to find a graduate-level job at that. How about regional variation? We suggested to the Minister that the Migration Advisory Committee look at that. I thought that was a very reasonable suggestion. Another thing the Government could do, which is totally within their gift at the tweaking end of how they could help to address and sort this problem, is reduce the burden of tier 2 sponsorship on employers. Overwhelmingly, employers told us that it was really difficult to secure international students. Those are things that could be done.

We also recommended that there should be a return to a post-study work scheme—we even suggested that a Scotland-only scheme could be possible. We have had the experience of Fresh Talent, which worked perfectly well. I know the Government had issues with it—we will probably hear a little about that from the Minister—and there were problems associated with it, but we learned from that experience and we could bring forward another scheme.

Things have changed since 2008 when Fresh Talent ended—I accept that. The immigration system has changed and we have a much more—I will use the word “cautious” approach to immigration issues, but, because of that caution, the Government have put a number of things in place. For example, landlords are now required to carry out rent checks before entering into tenancy agreements, whereby one could check the residency of international students. For some time now, employers have been required to carry out right-to-work checks on employees, and the partial devolution of income tax means that we have a perfect register to ensure that people who come to Scotland remain in Scotland—we can check where they are.

I think the Minister will tell us that that would not work for Scotland because people would go to the south-east and to the rest of England, but there is now a range of means and mechanisms available to Scotland to ensure that people who come to study in Scotland remain in Scotland. The thing is, if they break any of the conditions—if they are checked and they are in the south—they will just get kicked out. What is the point in that? They could come to a country that would welcome them, that wants them to be there and that recognises their ability to contribute, or they could go to the south-east and into the black market and be ever fretful of being pursued by the authorities. So of course this could work; there is no good reason that a Scotland-only scheme could not work.

Lastly, there is the commitment that the Government have already given us on trying to resolve the situation. I do not think that the Minister recognises our particular issues on this or understands some of these points. I think he has heard the chorus of complaints about the issue and the desire for a post-study work scheme to return to Scotland, but let us remind him of the commitment that the Government have to work with the Scottish Government in order to pursue that. That was in the Smith commission, which said:

“The Scottish and UK Governments should work together to explore the possibility of introducing formal schemes to allow international higher education students...to remain in Scotland and contribute”.

Nothing has been done on that, and I am not surprised by that given where the Government are when it comes to this. Instead, the Government response—I do not really want to go into it—was singularly disappointing, almost frustrating. To turn around and tell us, as they did in their short response, that the current arrangements are “excellent” is almost a slap in the face to the higher education institutions of Scotland and those who depend on them. They are not excellent, Minister—they are woeful, pitiful and not working for Scotland.

We are asking the Government to have another look at the matter and to have a look at our population and demography, because they are linked and they suggest a way forward for Scotland on the issue. We in Scotland do not share the Government’s obsession with immigration. In fact, quite the opposite; we actually value people coming to our country. We are not full up in Scotland. We see the value to our economy of immigration, particularly high-value immigration. The Government must try not to put their immigration obsession upon Scotland.

We in the Committee think we have produced a rounded report. It suggests a number of things the Government could do, from minor tweaking, which would help the current situation, to wholesale reform. It is disappointing that the Minister has singularly refused to do any of those things. With my colleagues from Scotland behind me, I tell the Minister to think again, to do the right thing for Scotland and to allow us to have a post-study work scheme to grow our economy and to keep international students in Scotland.

1.51 pm

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. Scotland has a long history of excellence in higher education. As a beautiful country with outstanding

[Deidre Brock]

international universities, it is a very attractive place for students from around the globe—despite the UK Government's best policy efforts to put them off.

International students are being hammered again and again, and at some point they might decide it is not worth the hassle and the hostility from UK Visas and Immigration and take their valued custom elsewhere. The UK Government say they are delivering an immigration system that is working in the national interest. I have to disagree. With an ageing population and with skills shortages across many sectors, it seems to me that policies that block successful routes for the brightest talent to stay and work are acting very much against our national interest. The Secretary of State for Scotland admitted as much in his evidence to the Scottish Affairs Committee—if only he would make his case more forcefully to his Cabinet colleagues in Westminster, instead of being the Cabinet mouthpiece in Scotland.

On immigration, as with so many issues, one size does not fit all. If the Tories do not wake up to that fact, they will wake up to a UK without Scotland sooner rather than later. It is not beyond the wit of the Government to modify policies to meet differing needs in different parts of the UK—they simply choose not to. I, along with my colleagues, as my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) mentioned, have to question why the post-study work visa was dropped. We know that it worked and that it successfully provided a workplace opportunity for new graduates in Scotland. As he said, we have seen 80% fewer people move to work visas since that was dropped.

The official excuse of widespread fraud seems to be a bit of a fraud in itself. The evidence from the Scottish university sector shows that it has an impeccable record as sponsors of genuine, high-calibre students. A leaked Government paper reported in *The Times* suggested that 99% of international students abide by the terms of their visa and return home when it runs out. Dropping the post-study work visa is perhaps to do with the Government's failing target to cut net migration, which my hon. Friend also referred to. That is something they know that cannot even properly measure, let alone control.

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** The hon. Lady spoke of “widespread fraud”. That is not something that we are worried about for universities, but it applies to more than 900 colleges, some of which had been taking people on courses that did not even exist. That is why we had to take action in that regard. She should not confuse our universities with some of those bogus language schools and other colleges that have lost their right to take overseas students.

**Deidre Brock:** Unfortunately, there are probably none of those colleges in Scotland. I am afraid the effect on the high-quality universities he refers to is significant, and he is not allowing for that in the immigration regulations that he is laying down.

Students make up the biggest numbers in the points-based system by far, which makes them an easy tap to turn on and off, and vulnerable to the whims of Whitehall number crunchers eager to massage immigration figures without the risk of pesky appeals. I accept that, rightly

or wrongly, people across the UK have concerns about immigration—perhaps it is those who are struggling due to the lack of Government investment in housing, health, schooling or jobs in their area—but the fact is that they are not worried about students. A recent survey showed that 76% of the UK public do not regard international students as immigrants at all. Universities in Scotland and the global talent they attract are massively important to our economy. There are 31,000 non-EU international students across Scotland from 180 countries. They contribute many millions of pounds per annum to Scotland's economy. That is a tap we need to keep flowing—not turn off.

It is not only about the numbers. Having people from so many different cultures living in Scotland greatly enriches our society in ways that we really cannot measure. Making the place less attractive to students, and making them part of the overall hostile environment strategy, is damaging to our universities. We cannot be happy to take their fees but hostile to letting them stay and work for a while. Students will vote with their feet and universities will suffer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire said, we have heard of big increases in the recruitment of international students—10% or 11% growth in 2015—in competitor nations, such as the US and Australia. That was the US's largest increase in 35 years, while the intake of non-EU international students across Scotland and the UK remains flat.

Scotland is fed up of being told to put up and shut up. We implore the UK Government to look at the evidence, listen to the university sector and help take Scotland forward, not haud us back.

1.56 pm

**Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP):** It is great to see you in the Chair, Mr Rosindell, and to follow two comprehensive and compelling speeches on the reintroduction of the post-study work visa.

Frankly, the Government's current immigration policy is completely failing Scotland. When gathering evidence for the Scottish Affairs Committee, we found that international students without doubt have an enormous positive impact on Scotland. That was recognised in all of the evidence we gathered from everyone we spoke to during our evidence sessions, including the Scottish and UK Governments. Not only do non-EU international students contribute an eighth of the total income of Scottish higher education institutions, it is also estimated that they contribute more than £400 million in off-campus expenditure.

In addition to those financial benefits, bringing together students from different nations creates a global environment in Scottish universities that benefits both the UK and international students. If that is not enough, it has even been backed by the UK Government's own statistics. The Home Office has estimated that the number of non-EU international students moving to work visas after their studies has fallen by more than 80%. The Home Office could not provide separate figures for Scotland, but the evidence the Committee collected showed that the impact on Scotland, where higher education is the third largest sector, is both significant and, sadly, negative.

Scotland has different demographic needs from other parts of the UK, as we found in the Scottish Affairs Committee's most recent report, which was published only a couple of weeks back. That is due to slower population growth and a need to expand the size of the workforce. Scotland also faces significant skills shortages in a variety of sectors. Retaining non-EU international graduates to work in Scotland is an important element of the response to those challenges. The report also recommended that the UK Government work constructively with the Scottish Government to introduce a formal scheme to allow international students graduating in Scotland to remain and contribute to economic activity. That principle enjoys cross-party support in Scotland, as well as being strongly backed by the business sector.

Given that two published reports have said more or less the same thing, it is now clear that the UK Government must act—and swiftly. To put that into perspective, I am blessed with not one but two universities in my constituency of Dundee, both of which have felt a huge impact since the UK Government ended the tier 1 post-study work visa. Indeed, the principals of both Dundee University and Abertay University have been vocal in their support for post-study work schemes that attract international students, all of whom make a valuable contribution to university and city life.

Professor Pete Downes, principal of the University of Dundee, said that an improved post-study work visa would

“put Scotland back on a competitive footing with universities in Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It would make life a lot easier for employers and it would help to address Scotland's skill gaps”.

Only yesterday, when taking evidence on Scotland's place in Europe, the Scottish Affairs Committee listened to economist Professor Anton Muscatelli describe the post-study work visa as a “hugely beneficial scheme”.

The Scottish Affairs Committee laid out several options for improving post-study work routes, ranging from minor changes to a more substantial overhaul, all of which could be readily implemented and would solve many of the challenges that both employers and international graduates face in Scotland. Those proposals, which are both pragmatic and feasible, include extending the length of time that tier 4 visa holders have to find a tier 2 job; creating what can only be described as a bridge visa, to give international graduates sufficient time to find a tier 2 job; having regional salary caps for tier 2 visas, to reflect different wages across the UK; and reducing the burden to employers of tier 2 sponsorship.

It goes without saying that all the evidence the UK Government have received through our Select Committee report has been completely disregarded. They seem more driven by ideology than pragmatic outcomes. I am extremely disappointed by the UK Government's response to the report. They completely rejected calls for a more flexible post-study work visa system for international students in Scotland. The report and recommendations, which were based on extensive discussions with businesses, universities and immigration lawyers, were disregarded by the Immigration Minister, who claimed in the Government response—this has to be the best euphemism I have ever heard—that the work visas already available to international graduates

“comprise an excellent post-study work offer”.

It is interesting to note that even after dismissing our findings, the UK Government are now trialling a new tier 4 visa for some postgraduate students in four universities in England, and—would you believe it?—not a single Scottish university has been included in that pilot. When will the UK Government listen? The calls from Scotland for a more flexible post-study work visa are overwhelming, but they have so far fallen on deaf ears.

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Gentleman talked about salary levels in Scotland. May I respectfully point out that salaries in Scotland are higher than in the UK as a whole? That means if we were to apply regional salary requirements, the minimum salary required to sponsor a tier 2 migrant in Scotland would be higher than it is currently, using the UK-wide data.

**Chris Law:** I hear the Minister's point, but I do not know of any students who graduate from university and find a starting salary of £20,800. The problem is where the threshold begins, which makes it almost impossible for people to continue to work straight after leaving university.

What is the point of spending week after week gathering evidence from different voices from across Scotland when no one is listening? The Government's immigration policy in no way recognises Scotland's needs or serves our economic and societal interests. Work study visas are not in isolation. The Government continue to resist pragmatic change that would not only help Scotland to attract international students but support the impact of Scotland's ageing demographic. What would really benefit Scotland is the full devolving of immigration power, so that we can ensure Scotland's thriving future.

2.3 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I am grateful for the Scottish Affairs Committee's work on this most important subject.

In Scotland we usually associate depopulation with rural areas that struggle to create jobs and retain young people in their communities. Areas such as the highlands and islands and Argyll and Bute do indeed contend with depopulation and have done so for hundreds of years. However, what is less recognised is that my constituency of Inverclyde, just 40 minutes from Scotland's largest city, has some of the highest rates of depopulation in Scotland.

A report from Inverclyde Council concluded that Inverclyde's rate of depopulation was proportionally higher than that of any local authority in the UK between 1981 and 2009. Over the same period, the number of young people in Inverclyde aged under 24 has fallen by 42%—almost double the rate of decline we have seen across Scotland as a whole. Since 1951, Inverclyde's population has shrunk by more than 57,000 people and is projected to decline for at least 20 more years. There are no easy or simple solutions to that problem, but if we are to see Scotland and Inverclyde reach their full economic potential, we need people. To help to get those people, we need a favourable immigration policy that addresses our specific circumstances.

The UK Government told us that they are “delivering an immigration system which works in the national interest and is fair to British citizens.”

[Ronnie Cowan]

Unfortunately, that is simply not a realistic appraisal of the effects of UK immigration policy. Whether it is spousal, work or post-study work visas, our immigration system does not work in the interests of Scotland or my constituency. The UK Government have also said:

“Uncontrolled, mass immigration also makes it difficult to maintain social cohesion, puts pressure on public services and can drive down wages for people on low incomes.”

I assure the Minister that I am more concerned about uncontrolled emigration and its effects on social cohesion and our ability to maintain social services, as well as the way in which it stifles investment and employment opportunities. In fact, over the years, the immigrants who have chosen to live in Inverclyde have contributed far more to our community than they have taken out of it.

The UK Government’s lack of understanding of our situation derives from their interpretation of the “national interest” to mean the interests of the south-east of England. The UK’s nations have a range of needs, and my constituency is not well served by an immigration policy tailored to population pressures in the south-east of England. It is therefore disappointing that the UK Government refuse to budge on post-study work visas, especially as there is overwhelming support for them to be reintroduced in Scotland. Liz Cameron, chief executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, says that

“it simply beggars belief that the UK Government is closing the door on an opportunity for talented international people to contribute to our economy.”

**Pete Wishart:** I want to draw my hon. Friend’s attention to our Committee’s very fine report on Scotland’s population and demography, which shows that Inverclyde is the second to last when it comes to immigration, with a projected -12% population change compared with the Scottish average. He is on to a very important point; there are regional variations in Scotland, but Scotland is way behind England when it comes to these things. I support him in saying we need to ensure we have these people coming to areas such as his.

**Ronnie Cowan:** I thank my hon. Friend for his timely intervention and for highlighting my point.

The inevitable result of the UK Government’s irrational commitment to reducing non-EEA migration is a Scotland that is less attractive to international students. The millions of pounds that those students contribute to our higher education sector will be under threat, and we will see a reduction in the influence and soft power we currently exert throughout the world. The frustrating aspect of this self-destructive policy is that it is entirely unnecessary and avoidable. We need only look to Canada, where regionally tailored visas are resulting in a more even distribution of migrants. If Canada and other countries can introduce regional variations in immigration policy, there is no reason the UK cannot do likewise.

The UK Government say the introduction of such a scheme would overcomplicate our immigration system. As the Minister is aware, Scotland previously introduced the Fresh Talent initiative, which allowed the Scottish Parliament, in partnership with the Home Office, to create a tailored policy to combat depopulation. The Fresh Talent initiative was not perfect, nor did it solve

all of Scotland’s problems, but the fact that it existed at all is proof of the UK Government’s ability to introduce regional variations in our immigration policy if there is a political will to do so. I do not agree that there are insurmountable practical barriers to implementing such a policy.

If the UK Government will not listen to Scotland’s elected representatives, perhaps they will listen to the experts in Scotland’s higher education sector. Universities Scotland said that the UK has

“one of the least competitive policies on post-study work in the English-speaking world.”

The University of Edinburgh warned that the removal of the post-study work visa was a “damaging” change that would lead to a

“‘brain drain’ of highly skilled global talent from Scotland.”

The principals of Glasgow University, Aberdeen University and Robert Gordon University have also voiced their concerns and called for the reintroduction of the post-study work visa in Scotland. If the UK Government are intent on maintaining their current policy, they cannot claim that it truly represents all of the UK’s nations. The Scottish higher education sector and Scotland’s elected representatives have made it very clear: Scotland wants the post-study work visa to be reinstated. It is not too late for the Government to make this positive change.

2.9 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. As a member of the Scottish Affairs Committee, I am delighted that we are here today to discuss our report into post-study work schemes and the Government’s response. I want to place on the record my gratitude to the Liaison Committee for selecting the report for debate, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who is leading the debate as ably as he chairs the Scottish Affairs Committee. Having sat with him through every oral evidence session, both in this place and in Scotland, I appreciate, as he does, just how different Scotland’s immigration needs are.

Again and again, the economy seems to be the highest priority for the people of Scotland, who value quality public services. There is a real understanding of the need for a strong economy to support them. I applaud the continued efforts of the Scottish Government in that regard, but many economic levers are still outwith their grasp. Immigration policy is a key area that remains reserved to Westminster, and although there is consensus across Scotland that the return of a post-study work route would be of enormous economic benefit to Scotland, the Home Office thus far has refused to act.

Why is this type of visa so important? Around a fortnight ago, the Centre for Cities published an insightful report, “The Great British Brain Drain: Where graduates move and why”. It found that the draw of London for the UK’s highest-achieving graduates is driving a brain drain that deprives Scotland and other nations and regions of talented workers. That resonates with one of the conclusions of the Scottish Affairs Committee’s report in which we noted with great concern that the outcome of the Migration Advisory Committee’s

recent review of the tier 2 visa does not meet the needs of Scotland compared with the rest of the United Kingdom.

Societal attitudes in Scotland are generally very open to immigration. One need only look at the recent EU referendum, for example. In parts of the UK, immigration seems to have been a prime motivation for how many people voted, whereas in Scotland, which voted overwhelmingly to remain, immigration rarely came up in the conversations I had with members of the public during the campaign. A much more influential factor seems to have been the economic impact of leaving the European Union and the fact that the implementation of the recommendations would further concentrate postgraduate work for non-EU international graduates in London and the south-east of England. Disappointingly, the Government failed to address that point in their response. Not only is their wilful ignorance doing Scotland a disservice, but the Centre for Cities report concluded that the brain drain to London risks damaging growth in the overall UK economy. In short, the Government are cutting off their nose to spite their face.

A return of the post-study route would allow talented students to remain and to contribute to the Scottish economy, which in turn would benefit the UK economy as a whole. There is no good reason why such a scheme could not be put in place in Scotland. It is hugely disappointing that despite repeated and sustained calls to introduce such a visa in Scotland, our universities are being excluded from the English tier 4 visa pilot that was announced in the summer. In the past, the Government have used a one-size-fits-all excuse for not allowing different immigration rules in Scotland from those in the rest of the UK, but the pilot blows that out of the water.

It is even more disappointing that UK Ministers have apparently ruled out a return of the post-study work visa in Scotland without even meeting Scottish Ministers or the cross-party steering group on the topic. The Scottish Affairs Committee concluded in February 2016 that the scrapping of the UK-wide visa scheme in 2012 had made Scotland a less attractive destination for study. The number of non-EU students remaining in Scotland after graduation fell by more than 80%. The resistance we face from the UK Government on this is unacceptable. It is damaging not only to our economy, but to our international standing.

**Deidre Brock:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Margaret Ferrier:** I am sorry, I will not take any interventions, because other Members want to speak and we want to hear from the Minister.

Scotland's universities are world-class and a destination of choice for students and academic staff from overseas. Five of our universities are ranked among the top 200 in the world, which is not at all bad for a wee nation of 5 million-plus people. The University of the West of Scotland, which is in the process of building a new campus in my constituency, ranks among the top 5% of universities worldwide. We are punching above our weight, yet the Home Office seems insistent on trying to disadvantage us by tying our shoelaces together.

UK immigration policy poses a significant risk to universities in Scotland, which are losing out to key competitors in attracting international students. We have seen a significant fall in the number of new entrants

from some countries since 2010-11. The number of Indian students has fallen by 59%, the number of Pakistani students has fallen by 38% and the number of Nigerian students has fallen by 26%. It is no coincidence that other countries are experiencing large increases in the number of international students in higher education.

In 2012-13 to 2013-14, international students in Canada increased by 11% and in Australia by 8%. In 2013-14 to 2014-15, the number of international students in higher education in the United States increased by 10%. It is likely the Government will say that there could be other factors affecting the figures, but they cannot escape the fact that the UK is becoming an increasingly hostile environment for immigrants in general. That fact, combined with the promise of a more attractive and accessible route to post-study work options in other countries, means we are losing out.

If the Government are truly committed to higher education in Scotland, they must start listening to the concerns of every main political party in Scotland, businesses, the education sector and trade unions, which are united behind a return of this visa to Scotland.

**Pete Wishart:** I do not know whether my hon. Friend is as impressed as I am about what we observe in the Scottish Parliament, where every political party supports the call for a return of a post-study work scheme. Even the Minister's colleagues in the Conservative party are working constructively to make the case. Does she agree that the calls from Scotland should not be ignored, particularly when they are cross-party and Conservative colleagues are involved?

**Margaret Ferrier:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. It is not just on the post-study work scheme that our voices are not heard loudly and clearly. Will the Minister liaise with his Conservative colleagues in the Scottish Parliament and move this ahead? It is apparent from the Government's response to the inquiry that there is a real unwillingness to do so. We need a change of direction and a change of attitude. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) said, we need a move from ideology to pragmatism. If this Tory Government are not prepared to do that, they should hand the power to do so to the Scottish Government, who stand ready to do a much better job.

2.17 pm

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Rosindell, particularly as I had not indicated in advance that I wanted to do so. However, I believe we have time available for the debate until 3 o'clock, so I appreciate being called. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I commend the Chair of the Scottish Affairs Committee, the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart)—I hope I do not burst into flames for saying that—on the way in which he conducted the post-study work visa inquiry. I hope we do not push that to a Division. I joined the Committee after the inquiry had started, but I was on it when it considered the report, which is full and fair. The Minister and the Government should reflect seriously on it.

Since the EU referendum result, we have seen that one size no longer fits all, as we heard from the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock). Post-study work visas are one area where one size

[*Ian Murray*]

certainly does not fit all, and did not in the past. We heard about the Fresh Talent initiative that the former First Minister in Scotland put in place, which was a slightly different scheme from any in the rest of the UK until it was rolled out across the whole of the UK. Of course there were problems and well-documented evidence of bogus universities bringing people to the UK to work, but such issues should have been dealt with when considering how the scheme operated, rather than by scrapping the whole scheme and throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

The Select Committee report sets out a number of fair and reasonable suggestions that the Government could look at to keep the UK framework and foundation of the immigration system. I understand all the arguments about not fragmenting the system, and ensuring that it is fair to everyone and that Britain remains open and free across its borders, but things can be done to make the system much more responsive to the people who are here.

It is not just the Select Committee saying that. It is indeed a cross-party report that was unanimously agreed, but many of the people who gave evidence said the same thing. Sir Tim O'Shea, principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Edinburgh, is hugely experienced in the higher education sector and was very animated, when he came to speak to the Committee, about the impact that the current situation is having on a world-class university such as Edinburgh. The reason why he was so animated was that a university in a country such as Scotland does not become one of the top 20 universities in the world unless it can attract the best talent to study at the university and unless that talent can be kept there beyond university to feed some of the information and experience that it has had back into the university sector.

This is about much more than just the nuts and bolts of allowing people to work here beyond their university career. It is about cultural enrichment. It is about people putting something back when they have taken something out. It is about the contribution that they make when they are here—£15,000 in fees alone and the annual moneys that they put into our local economies. As a former owner of a bar at the heart of Edinburgh University's student life, I know that we could not have survived without students participating in the odd libation of an evening, or every evening in some cases. That is why it is so important that we get this right.

I was pleased when the then Minister for Immigration and the Secretary of State for Scotland came to the Select Committee and explained a little about the trials being done at Imperial College and the Universities of Bath, Oxford and Cambridge to look at how the system can be reformed. I am highly critical of the criteria used to pick those universities. I am not critical of the universities being picked—they have obviously ended up at the top of the list as a result of the criteria. I just say to the Minister, with all genuine respect, that he should look at putting a Scottish university into that list, for a number of reasons. First, it would enhance the trial, on the basis of the differentials that the Chair of the Committee has already spoken about and the embracing of the post-study work visa by Scottish universities. Also—I say this with all sincerity—it would take away

the undermining of the trial by Scottish MPs complaining constantly that there is no Scottish university in the list. Let us pop one in there and enhance the trial, and if it works, a Scottish university will already be part of the trial and part of the system that may transpire from it.

We also need to examine the figure of £20,800. I remember as a student in my final year at Edinburgh University going to the careers service and not having one iota of a clue what I wanted to do when I left university, so I ended up leafing through the brochures sent in by graduate employers, looking at how much they paid on the back and applying for all the ones that paid the most. I cannot remember—it was 20 years ago—seeing many salaries that would have been the equivalent of £20,800 now. We can understand that if someone who is earning £21,000, £22,000, £23,000 or £24,000, it is quite good for them to be on the scheme, and of course they can get the visa attached to that, but there must be some flexibility about the £20,800.

**Mr Goodwill:** Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that if we reduced the salary threshold for overseas students, that could bring downward pressure to bear on salaries paid to British students—Scottish students—who are taking the self-same jobs?

**Ian Murray:** They are not getting those salaries, though, are they? If they were, we would be complaining about that preventing people from entering the workplace. There is always a reason for having figures. All we are asking—this is all the report said—is for the Government to look at having a little bit of flexibility on whether £20,800 is the right figure for a salary. I understand what the Minister says about differential salaries, and I agree that the average salary in Scotland would not always be lower than £20,800, given the matrix of average salaries across the UK. Perhaps removing London and the south-east from the system and then recalculating the average would be a slightly fairer system to use.

I ask the Minister to look not only at the £20,800, but at popping a Scottish university with low numbers of visa rejections into the system. I have asked the Home Office for the data, but they are covered by data protection, so I cannot see which Scottish university would be fifth on the list, or could be used, but I am sure that the Minister can go away and look at that.

A much bigger thing—this might even help the Conservative Government with the net migration figures—would be to take international students who are here for bona fide study and work out of the immigration figures. That would be a perfectly sensible thing to do. Everyone in the country, whether completely anti or completely pro-immigration, would no doubt see it as reasonable that someone coming here to study as an international student should not be part of the immigration figures. They are here to study, to learn, and, if they meet the criteria for an additional visa, to work. That sensible approach would automatically reduce the country's immigration figures, so it would be a good news story. It would also mean that our universities were not subject to constant right-wing attacks about the immigration figures because they are bringing in students, even though those students bring an awful lot of money into the country. That money also oils the wheels of finance departments in universities so that they can deliver the education system that we all wish to have.

There are a number of ideas in the report, and a number of additional ideas for the Minister. I look forward to hearing an additional response from him, but I do plead with him to have a look at the report. It is not an attack on the Government or the immigration system. It contains sensible, reasonable and measured recommendations to try to make the system better for our constituents, but also for our wonderful, world-class higher education system in Scotland.

2.26 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) and his new colleagues—the fresh talent—on the Scottish Affairs Committee on their excellent work on this important issue and on bringing this debate to the House.

I thank all hon. Members for their contributions today. All of them, in their own eloquent way, added to the convincing—indeed, overwhelming—case for reintroducing the post-study work visa in Scotland. It is really an open-and-shut case. In short, reintroducing the visa would be good for our universities and students, for business and the economy and for Scotland—for the country as a whole.

On the first point, we have heard already how non-EU international students are of great value to Scotland's universities and the economy. Each year, they bring in about £444 million in fees alone and an estimated £488 million in off-campus expenditure—not all, I hope, in the pubs of the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray). Universities Scotland has calculated that Scotland has lost out on at least £254 million of revenue since 2012 as a result of the closure of the tier 1 post-study work visa. That figure does not include the considerable additional economic benefits from highly skilled international graduates contributing to the Scottish economy after university.

We should always remember, however, that in addition to the positive economic benefit from attracting these bright international students, they contribute immeasurably to the quality of the educational experience for all students. Domestic students and staff are exposed to different perspectives, contributing to their international experience and the development of critical thinking. International students create a more culturally diverse environment.

On the second point, hon. Members have highlighted how important retaining some international students here can be for business. They broaden the skills base and bring new ideas and links. In 2014, about 25% of all job vacancies in Scotland were hard to fill because of a shortage in available skills. That was up from 15% in 2011, and the closure of the post-study work route has certainly not helped in that regard.

On the third point, hon. Members have spoken about how Scotland as a whole benefits from a post-study work scheme, not only because of the demographic challenges that we face—an issue to which I will return shortly—but because attracting international students is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) said, key to a nation's soft power. Scotland and

the UK as a whole would benefit by gaining a vast network of global ambassadors among our international alumni.

Against that background, the very bad news is that removal of the post-study work scheme has had a substantial impact on the ability of students to remain in the United Kingdom after graduation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire said, last year only 7,000 international students from across the UK made the transfer from tier 4 to tier 2; in 2011 that figure was close to 50,000, so there has been an overwhelming drop of more than 80%.

The case for a post-study work scheme for Scotland is therefore a powerful one. Unfortunately, the response from the UK Government has been hugely frustrating. Their arguments just do not stack up. The Government argue that international student numbers have remained steady or even increased slightly since the post-study work scheme ended, but, as my hon. Friend said, that misses the point. There is no doubt that we could have attracted even more students with a post-study work offer that was commensurate with what our rivals in other English-speaking countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada offer. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) pointed out, Scotland has seen a 59% decrease in the number of students from India since 2009-10. Indeed, the year after the post-study work route closed, recruitment of students from India fell by 26% in a single year. In their argument on the numbers, the Government miss another point: in Scotland, not only do we want students to come, but we want some of them to stay afterwards, and the current system has impacted on that severely.

The Government also argue, on the basis of a small and imperfect evaluation report, that the Fresh Talent scheme had flaws. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire that the scheme was a great success, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) said, no one is arguing that it was absolutely perfect. The point made by the hon. Member for Edinburgh South was absolutely right: we should not ditch a whole scheme on that basis but address its imperfections, improve it and make it work.

The principal argument is that a significant number of students graduating from Scottish universities then went to work in other parts of the UK. However, the key point is that the visa did not prohibit that happening. Those students were doing absolutely nothing wrong, so the answer is simple: make it a formal condition on the face of the visa that the person lives and works in Scotland. That should be no more difficult than making it a condition of a person's visa that they study on a particular course or work for a particular employer.

The Government argue that there is already a competitive post-study work offering, but the UK post-study work offer barely exists, in that there are basically four months of additional leave after graduation in which to find a job that qualifies for tier 2. That does not remotely compare to the offerings of competitor countries in north America or Australia and New Zealand.

I could spend my whole speech discussing why tier 2 is not working well for Scotland in particular; my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire also touched on that. Our small and medium-sized enterprises are at a significant disadvantage in complying with the

[Stuart C. McDonald]

rules and regulations, compared with the big multinationals that make full use of them in other parts of the UK economy. Suffice it to note—as my hon. Friend did—that just 6% of tier 2 sponsors are in Scotland and Northern Ireland compared with 62% in London and the south-east, so the rules are working for London. However, it is not just Scotland that is struggling to compete—other parts of the UK are losing out as well.

**Pete Wishart:** I am glad my hon. Friend picked up on the point about 62% of tier 2 sponsors being in London and the south-east. That area does not require the international students, so I am pretty certain that he would agree that we should try and make the situation equitable across the United Kingdom and incentivise people to come to Scotland. That surely reinforces the call for regional variation on these issues, so that we can get international students in Scotland and not where they are probably not required—that is, in London and the south-east.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is not just about Scotland—Northern Ireland, Wales and parts of England are struggling to compete with London. The one-size-fits-all rules are set according to the economic needs of London and the south-east, so an extra couple of months, as is offered in the Government pilot scheme, will not alter the position. As other hon. Members have said, the failure to include any Scottish universities in that pilot was a slap in the face and a political own goal.

The Government are trying to defend the indefensible. I will close with two broader points. First, as has already been touched on, this is ultimately being driven by the Prime Minister's obsession with the net migration target, which is making her pick the low-hanging fruit—in other words, international students. In fact, the current Home Secretary has tried to ditch or water down the net migration target—I think she probably knows it is a nonsensical target. We also know that both the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor think that students should be taken out of the net migration target. The Home Secretary was asked about this issue three times on Monday, but she dextrously avoided saying whether she agreed with her colleagues. Perhaps the Minister will answer instead: does he agree that, if we are to be stuck with this ludicrous net migration target, the target should exclude students? While we are at it, there is a strong case for excluding Scotland from the net migration altogether as well.

My second broader point is about what this debate means more generally for Scotland's population. The post-study work visa is significant for Scotland but, in another sense, it is just a smaller aspect of a much bigger question about the extent to which the UK Government are prepared to consider particular immigration rules for Scotland. That question is of immense importance. As hon. Members have said, our demographic needs are different, as the Committee's report highlighted. The challenge for Scotland has now become growing the population and retaining the proportion of our population that is of working age. If the Government are not even going to engage meaningfully

on post-study work, what chance do we have of meaningful engagement on broader issues about managing Scotland's population?

Government must come to terms with the idea that different parts of the UK can have different immigration policies. The idea is not novel—Australia and Canada do it and the Minister has often said that there is a different shortage occupation list for Scotland, so it can be done—and its time has come. An important forthcoming example is the issue of free movement. If free movement of people is not to be retained for the whole United Kingdom, the Government must quickly get working on how it can be retained for some parts of the UK, including Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) said, if the Government do not get that message, then to put it mildly, they are playing with constitutional fire.

In conclusion, I know that the Minister met with Minister Alasdair Allan from the Scottish Government yesterday afternoon. I do not expect the Minister to perform a 180-degree U-turn today, welcome as that would be, but I expect and hope for more than a straightforward “No”. I expect a genuine willingness to engage, negotiate and resolve the impasse that has developed not just between the UK Government and the Scottish Government, but between the UK Government and Scotland's universities, businesses, trade unions, students and civic society—all of Scotland, essentially.

2.35 pm

**Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab):** It is a great pleasure to appear under your chairmanship today, Mr Rosindell. I welcome the report, and not just because I was part of the Committee that drew it together back in February. I am a huge supporter of the Select Committee system. It does the House credit because, by and large, the people who serve on Select Committees park their partisanship to try to do a piece of work for the benefit of the people they are doing it for.

An exceptional thing that the Scottish Affairs Committee does is take the Committee out to the people. It goes around the country and not only takes advice from experts during sittings, but invites the public to come to play their part in discussions. Before, during and after the formal part of discussions, it engages with people who have an interest, which gives a much broader view that shapes the Committee's reports. Our discussion today reflects both that and how seriously people take this issue in Scotland.

What is the situation in Scotland? It is a nation that needs to stem population drift. I welcome the news from the Chair of the Committee that that is being reversed to some extent—I had not picked up on that, but it really is good news. It is a nation that welcomes students and workers from across the world and that has an education system that is second to none. It is a nation that has always welcomed strangers warmly, a nation that has a cultural history without compare, a nation that offers a lifestyle and standard of living as good as anywhere on this planet, a nation that wants and needs to build up its ranks of workers, researchers, scientists and everyone else capable of driving this great country forward. Where I come from, we call that a win-win situation for all concerned.

What do we have against us? We have a Government in Westminster who act as if Scotland is some sort of colony, still under the rule of empire; a Government who are driven by fear of their own rabid Back Benchers and the xenophobes hounding them across the country; a Government who sign up to a ridiculous populist commitment to reduce immigration to below 100,000—they have to accept that they have failed repeatedly to reach their own targets—a Government who are ignoring the needs of the nation as a whole to bolster their own political status in this House.

That is all shown not only by this debate, but, for example, by the desperate plea made last week by fruit growers in the east of England. This year they have seen a 14% drop in the number of applicants to come for the fruit-picking season from eastern Europe. The fear is that it will only get worse and could lead to the ridiculous situation of produce being left to rot in the fields of England and the whole country, all because of the attitude the Government have taken towards immigration.

Everything is a direct result of that policy, with the blurring of lines between asylum seekers, refugees and economic migrants in the mind of far too many in this country, and we in this House have allowed that to happen—all those people being lumped together into one group is a negative for this country. Anything that can be done to drive down the immigration numbers to reach the Government's ridiculous targets is being done by our civil servants on behalf of the Government.

The Government are paralysed by the policy, and sensible discussions or suggestions such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)—that students are taken out of the immigration numbers—the Government dare not do. They dare not be seen as backsliding, because they know they will be attacked by people from the far right. Instead of having the bottle to stand up and take them on, saying, "It's the right thing to do because it's what the people of this country need," the Government are far too worried about the electoral consequences.

Everyone in this House will have seen immigration cases in their own case loads in recent months and years, with people saying that they, their family or dependants are not being allowed access to this country, whereas in the past they would have been allowed in on exactly the same applications. More and more obstacles are being put in the way of people simply as a mechanism to get the numbers down to a ridiculous target. If the Government were really serious about controlling immigration, they would start by putting real pressure on exploitative employers.

**Pete Wishart:** The hon. Gentleman was a very valued member of the Scottish Affairs Committee. I must say, on behalf of the Committee, that we miss him and we are very grateful for his remarks today. Does he share my concern with where we are going with all this? Currently, EU students can come to UK and Scottish universities uninhibited by any immigration rules. Maybe we will hear from the Minister himself, but does the hon. Gentleman share my fear that EU students might be treated similarly to non-EU international students? Will they also be expected to fall into all these immigration tests?

**Mr Anderson:** I thank the Chair of the Committee for his kind words. He is absolutely right. It is clear that the tone that is now set in this country is one of saying, "We don't want strangers anymore." We are not welcoming and that is abhorrent for people. I know that the Scottish people, people from my part of the country, and certainly people from where the Minister is from are not like that. We are warm, welcoming people. Virtually all of us who live on this island, somewhere down the line, are immigrants to this place. Hardly any of us can go back and say, "I've been here since the stone age," and that has created a country and a nation that is at ease with itself, and that has welcomed and led the world in so many ways, but we are becoming narrow-minded and not the sort of people we want to be. I accept that people from around Europe will look at us and say, "Why would I go there? I should go somewhere else where I'll be made to feel welcome." It is a real worry.

Getting back to where I was, if the Government are really serious, they would be putting the pressure where it belongs and disincentivising exploitative employers who are abusing workers they bring to this country; properly policing the implementation of the national minimum wage; and ensuring that health and safety legislation was properly and fully adhered to on behalf of the immigrant workforce. If they were really serious, they would prevent immigrant workers being forced to live in conditions that would have shamed the hostels used in the apartheid days in South Africa, and stop employers using bonds to tie unhappy workers into contracts that are not worth the paper that, quite often, they are not even written on. Disincentivising exploitative employers would do more to reduce immigration numbers in this nation than any of the ridiculous schemes being promised so far that are so clearly failing.

The report should be a wake-up call for the Government. They should drop this sham of a policy and look instead at the real needs of the nation, at what has been said and at what this is about—the future of the country and the future of Scotland, which needs people to come in for the betterment of us all. Failure to do so is a detriment to us all. This report was done in good faith and it expresses the real needs of Scotland. It deserves a much better response than it has had so far.

2.43 pm

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. If I may, I will leave a couple of minutes at the end for the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who moved the motion, to respond. I congratulate him on securing the debate and I congratulate all hon. Members who have participated on their valuable contributions to a spirited debate. Indeed, such has been the turnout for the Scottish National party, it has almost been like a scene from "Braveheart". I welcome the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland. During my short time as Immigration Minister, I have faced seven Members of the Labour party across the Dispatch Box, and I have had seven slightly different takes on what Labour's immigration policy might be. I hope we can get some clarity at some point.

It would be careless of me not to begin with the fact that the Scottish people knew, when they voted in the Scottish independence referendum, that issues such as

[Mr Robert Goodwill]

immigration and defence were not devolved matters. Therefore, the majority agreed that that should continue to be the situation. Incidentally, despite what the shadow Secretary of State said about my party's attitude to Scotland, I want to put on the record that Scotland, like Yorkshire, is an important part of our country and that use of the word "colony" is really not appropriate. Perhaps the people in Scotland are slightly more generous than people from Yorkshire, but both are vital parts of our country. More Scots chose to vote Conservative than Labour in the last Scottish election. Indeed, many would say that Labour has become irrelevant in Scotland and that only the Conservatives are seen as offering a real choice for our people north of the border.

I am pleased to say that, on some key issues, there are no differences between any of us, whichever side of the border we are on. International students make an important contribution to UK educational institutions not just because of the income they bring, but because of the wider perspective they contribute and the lasting links they forge with this country. Let me be clear: there is no limit on the number of genuine international students who can come to study in the United Kingdom, and we have no intention of imposing any limit or cap. I hope that all hon. Members will acknowledge and welcome that fact. Let me also be clear about what that means in practice. The Government have taken seriously our duty to clear up the mess we inherited from the previous Government, including stopping more than 900 bogus institutions bringing in international students, and the number of genuine international higher education students has risen. Indeed, since 2010, the number of international students at Scottish universities has increased by 14%. I wish that those who seem to trade in doom and gloom would celebrate that fact and help the excellent universities in Scotland to flourish.

The hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) raised a point about numbers falling. I point out that non-EU enrolments at Scotland's Russell Group universities have increased. Between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the University of Edinburgh's numbers were up by 9%, and the University of Glasgow's were up by 32%. That is a great achievement by some of our great institutions.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The point here is not a comparison between where we are now and where we were a few years back. It is about where we are now and where we could have been if we still had the post-study work visa. Universities Scotland has highlighted the fact that it has lost out on hundreds of millions of pounds of income, so we would have had more international students. That is an appropriate comparison and that is what the Minister has to address.

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Gentleman continually makes such points, but we must always bear in mind that many of those numbers are people who did not come here to study at all in some cases. They enrolled in bogus colleges intending not to study, but merely to take low-skilled jobs as a way of getting into the country and, in some cases, achieving residency in due course.

Let me turn to the issue of post-study work in Scotland, dealing first with the Fresh Talent—Working in Scotland scheme, which closed in 2008 because of its manifest

limitations. An evidence review of the Fresh Talent scheme published by Scottish Government Social Research in 2008 refers to analysis of in-country applications conducted by the Border and Immigration Agency between June and August 2007, showing that a significant proportion of respondents were not in the types of job they would have liked to be in, with about four in 10 stating that their employment was not linked to their career choice, and more than half saying that it was not even appropriate to their level of education.

The Government closed the tier 1 post-study work route in April 2012. The route granted free access to the UK labour market for two years to international students who graduated in the UK. Too many individuals in the route were unemployed or in low-skilled work, and too many were using the student route as a means to work in the United Kingdom without any intention to study. We also saw a large number of fraudulent applications, which undermined our work routes and damaged the reputation of our education system. However, the closure of the two schemes does not mean that the United Kingdom fails to provide an attractive offer for international graduates of our universities. We have a generous offer for international students graduating from UK universities, which contains important safeguards to protect against abuse, the undermining of our work migration routes, and students being exploited by being used in low-skilled work or remaining in the United Kingdom unemployed.

With our current post-study provisions, the number of international students switching from tier 4 into tier 2 in the UK has been increasing. In 2015, the number was more than 6,000—up from around 5,500 grants in 2014, and around 4,000 grants in 2013. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire made the allegation that we will "boot them out". That is not the case. He talked about people having to find a job in four months, which is also not the case. They can start looking for a job before they finish their course, and many participate in the famous milk round, in which employers go around universities before exams and graduation have been completed. The important point is that there is no limit, and never has been, on the number of international graduates of UK universities who can move into skilled jobs in the UK workforce. There is no limit on the number of tier 4 students who can move into tier 2 jobs. Students moving into skilled jobs do not count against the annual tier 2 general limit.

Another point was on students being able to stay for up to two or four months before switching. Four visa categories are available to non-European economic area graduates of UK universities who wish to remain in the UK to work. First, those with an offer of a graduate-level job that pays an appropriate salary may take sponsored employment through tier 2. Secondly, those who have been identified by their higher education institution or by UK Trade & Investment can stay on for up to two years to develop their businesses in the UK under the tier 1 graduate entrepreneur category. Thirdly, graduates wishing to undertake a period of professional training or a corporate internship related to their qualifications can do so under tier 5. Lastly, PhD students can stay in the UK for an extra year under the tier 4 doctorate extension scheme to look for work or to start their own business.

We need to be clear that this debate is not about skilled work or ensuring that graduate-level skills are available to Scotland. That is already provided for.

The Scottish National party is arguing for the right for international graduates to stay in this country to work in low-skilled and unskilled jobs. I fail to see how that benefits the economy of any part of the United Kingdom.

Although I recognise and welcome the work in Scotland to reduce unemployment rates—I note that there are still 129,000 unemployed people in Scotland—as in other parts of our country, the unemployment rate has fallen in recent years. Many of those people may already have the skills, or could acquire the skills, to take up jobs that do not require graduate training.

The other argument advanced by the SNP is that not having post-study work schemes makes the UK education sector less competitive than all our key international competitors. Perhaps we should look at the facts. An international student graduating from a UK university can stay in this country for at least two months after graduating, during which they can do whatever they like, including both working and looking for tier 2 employment that would allow them to stay on. If they have undertaken a course lasting more than a year, which covers the majority of international students in the UK, they can remain for four months.

The only country with a greater number of international students than the UK is the United States of America. In the United States international graduates, other than those undertaking work directly relevant to their degree, must leave the country within 60 days of completing their programme. In passing, I note that Canadian study permits become invalid 90 days after the conclusion of a study programme, which again is less generous than the position that applies to most international students in the UK. I hope we will not hear any more rhetoric about the UK's uncompetitiveness on international students.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** The Minister is talking about the student visa itself. The US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand all have post-study work offerings that allow people to switch without, say, salary thresholds for 12 months or, in one case, 24 months. The Minister is not making a fair comparison.

**Mr Goodwill:** I have mentioned the four routes that graduates can take, but I make it clear that coming to the UK to study and obtain a degree is not a way into low-skilled work or unemployment. The vast majority of students come to the UK to study and then go back to contribute to their country's economy. Indeed, on the statistics, those students do not contribute to net migration. If a person comes here to study and leaves at the end of their course, they do not contribute to net migration.

The hon. Members for Dundee West (Chris Law) and for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) spoke of the tier 4 visa pilot. In recent months, some Scottish National party Members seem to have fixated on the claim that Scottish universities have somehow been deliberately and consciously excluded from the tier 4 visa pilot. The four universities chosen were selected objectively, with no prejudice—indeed, if there were prejudice, I suspect we would have had one in Yorkshire—and, as a result, the pilot includes the top four institutions based on their consistently low levels of visa refusals. There was no agenda to limit those involved to universities in any region of the UK.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) is keen on putting words in my mouth, and I am not saying that all institutions not currently involved in the pilot have a poor record of immigration compliance. There are plenty of excellent institutions throughout the UK, including in Scotland. However, the four institutions participating in the pilot have the best record, which is why they have been chosen. We have deliberately kept it small scale, and I assure hon. Members that it will be properly evaluated. Should the pilot prove a success, it will be rolled out more widely—including, I hope, to universities in Scotland.

Finally, the Government continue to engage widely with the further and higher education sectors. Only yesterday, as has been mentioned, I met Dr Alasdair Allan, the Scottish Government's Minister for International Development and Europe, to discuss these points.

I have time to touch on one or two other points. It was claimed that the number of Indian students coming to the UK has fallen by half, which should be viewed in the context of the clampdown on abuse. We issue more tier 4 visas to students from India than to students from any other country except China and the United States. The proportion of Indian students in the UK who are studying at a university has increased from some 50% in 2010 to some 90% in 2015. The 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, some 90% of Indian students who applied for a tier 4 visa were issued one, which is up from 86% in 2014 and 83% in 2013. The Indian student grant rate is higher than in our competitor countries, and in quarter 3 of 2016 there was a 6% increase in the number of tier 4 visas issued to Indian students compared with 2015.

As anticipated, this has been a lively debate. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions. I reiterate that genuine students are welcome, and will continue to be welcome, in the United Kingdom. The UK has an enviable reputation as the home of world-class educational institutions, and the Government will continue to help them to ensure that they can continue bringing in the best and brightest students from across the globe to all parts of the UK, particularly Scotland.

2.57 pm

**Pete Wishart:** Thank you for the opportunity to say a few quick words at the end of what has been an excellent debate, Mr Rosindell. I thank everyone who has helped out and participated in this important inquiry for the Scottish Affairs Committee. In the new Committee's very early days, we were requested to look at these issues.

I take it from the Minister that that will be a no, then. We have made a sustained case, and it is not just the Scottish National party. Every sector in Scotland—higher education, the trade unions, representatives of business organisations and the Minister's colleagues in the Scottish Parliament—is saying that post-study work schemes are required. He fails to recognise what post-study work schemes offer. It is not about trying to find unskilled employment, and there would be conditions on the type of employment that people would be expected to get. It is about giving people the opportunity to find and secure employment.

[Pete Wishart]

Nobody has told us that four months is adequate to secure such employment, particularly for £20,800. We suggested a few modest tweaks that could have helped to address the situation. I listened, but the Minister does not sound amenable to our proposals. Have a look at the regional cap for Scotland. It is a privilege that international students want to come to Scotland to study and that some decide to make Scotland their home. Give them a chance to find meaningful, constructive employment in Scotland that will enhance their community and develop our economy.

I will end with the words of Professor Diamond, who spoke of what happens when we have international students who value their experience here. They enrich our campuses and allow indigenous Scottish students to be educated in their company. They are also fantastic ambassadors when they go back to their country. If they have a positive experience of Scotland, it is carried for years and generations, resulting in goodwill towards our nation in the future. All we want is a chance for people who have chosen to come to Scotland to have an opportunity to find meaningful employment and to make a significant contribution. Scotland is different in our immigration and demographic requirements. We have a different set of population issues and challenges, and we need assistance in trying to address them. I hope the Government think once again about the Committee's very modest demands.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Scottish Affairs Committee of Session 2015-16, Post-study work schemes, HC 593, and the Government response, HC 787.

## UK Ivory Trade

[MRS ANNE MAIN *in the Chair*]

### BACKBENCH BUSINESS

[*Relevant document: E-petition 165905, entitled "Shut down the domestic ivory market in the UK."*]

2.59 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the UK ivory trade.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. With your permission, I will outline the case for ending the UK ivory trade and will leave much of the detail to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), who has spoken regularly in this House about it. I pay tribute to the work of Lord Hague and many other right hon. and hon. Members for whom this is a matter of great concern.

This debate also addresses the subject of a petition to shut down the domestic ivory market in the UK, which has attracted more than 75,000 signatures. My near neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), has asked me to say that he would very much have liked to be here, but he had a prior commitment. His article in *The Daily Telegraph* makes a strong case for ending the UK ivory trade. I also want to pay tribute to the work of Tusk, the World Wildlife Fund, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and other organisations for highlighting the threat to elephants and other endangered species.

The elephant population in sub-Saharan Africa has declined dramatically over the past decade. It is estimated that some 30%—perhaps 144,000—have disappeared in the past seven years, substantially as a result of poaching. Estimates of the remaining population vary, but there are perhaps as few as 400,000 to 450,000. This is an emergency that requires emergency action.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): What my hon. Friend is saying will have widespread support in all parts of the House. Does he agree that there is something both revolting and nauseating about those who slaughter an endangered animal to use a part of its body as an ornament?

**Jeremy Lefroy**: My right hon. Friend has put it much better than I could. I entirely agree with him.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I apologise, because I will not be able to stay for the whole debate. My hon. Friend has spoken about the decline of elephants in Africa, but there are also Asian elephants. Is he going to say anything about what we can do to help the elephant in Asia?

**Jeremy Lefroy**: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I will concentrate on African elephants, because I know a little more about them, but I am sure the issue of Asian elephants—indeed, all elephants—will be brought up in the debate.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): There is no greater expert on African affairs in the House than my hon. Friend, so I am grateful that he has secured

the debate. Is he worried, as I am, that Her Majesty's Government may be underestimating the extent to which the elephant population is declining? In a Government answer on 1 November—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. We must keep interventions short. A lot of people want to speak.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I am most grateful for the intervention, Mrs Main. I agree that we perhaps run the risk of underestimating the problem. I am sure my hon. Friend will say more about it later.

I have been fortunate enough to spend 20% of my life in the beautiful country of Tanzania, and therefore fortunate to see elephants in the wild on many occasions. Tanzania has done a huge amount over the decades to protect wildlife by creating possibly the world's finest network of national parks and game reserves. I declare an interest as chairman of the all-party group on Tanzania. One park in particular comes to mind. Our family stayed in a hut in the remote Ruaha national park in 1999. We lay awake listening to the noise of an elephant, possibly only two or three feet the other side of the tin wall, munching its way through the night. It was an extraordinary sound.

Of course, human-elephant cohabitation is not always easy. A friend of mine who farms coffee and maize on the outer slopes of the Ngorongoro crater showed us where elephants regularly came down from the forest to find salt. Sometimes they went further down, walking through the coffee, in which they were not interested, to the maize, in which they most certainly were. A herd of elephants could easily polish off a large field of maize in a night.

However, what we are speaking about today is not the result of human-elephant conflict, but the deliberate mass slaughter of elephants by criminal gangs who will stop at nothing—certainly not murder—to profit from ivory. Brave rangers who try to protect the elephants are outgunned and sometimes pay with their lives. Tanzania is estimated to have lost 60% of its elephants in the past five years, particularly in the Selous.

**Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con):** This is a very important debate, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend has secured it. Does he agree that we should ask the Government to toughen up our own regulations to counter the problem, because we need to show leadership so that others will follow us?

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I will indeed say that in a moment.

What drives the slaughter? It is the demand for ivory around the world. As His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge has said,

“At the root of the illegal wildlife trade...is the demand for products that require the deaths of tens of thousands of these animals every year, pushing them further towards extinction.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire and I are therefore calling for an end, now, to the trade in ivory in the UK, and indeed the world. The World Wildlife Fund, Tusk and many other organisations support that closure, with small pragmatic exceptions such as antique musical instruments, cutlery or furniture where ivory is a very small proportion of the item. However, even those exceptions need to be drawn tightly to avoid them becoming loopholes.

It will be rightly pointed out that an end to the ivory trade in the UK, or indeed the world, will not on its own lead to an end to demand and the consequent slaughter of elephants. Trade may be driven underground. I accept that; that is why I do not argue that bringing the trade to an end is the only measure we need to take. We should support the work of Governments in protecting elephants and other endangered species, as the United Kingdom is doing with assistance from the armed forces we are sending to Malawi next year. We need a global education campaign that shows people the reality of what is happening, so as to make the purchase of anything made from ivory unacceptable.

Local communities in and around conservation areas and national parks that host elephants and other endangered species need to see more of the benefit from tourism. The Conservative party manifestos in 2010 and 2015 committed to ending the ivory trade in the UK. We call on the Government to fulfil that commitment. They took an important step with the Secretary of State's announcement in September of a ban on modern-day ivory sales, and I welcome that, but we need to go much further. My plea today is for the Government to do what the Governments of the United States and France have almost done—and what stands clearly in our manifesto—and bring an end to the trade in the UK.

3.8 pm

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing the debate and on his work in this area. It strikes me that there are a number of practical things we can do. The hon. Gentleman has highlighted one, and I will highlight two others that can add to his call for an absolute ban in this country. It would be good to have a Minister who acts while in post rather than waiting until being elevated to the House of Lords to shout. The power is there, and the people are in agreement with the Minister and the Government. Indeed, the more the petition circulated, the more tens of thousands added their names.

Too often, it seems to me, we in this place live for now, or perhaps for the next election—what can be done tomorrow and what was said yesterday. In this debate we are talking about the next generation. This year I happen to be able to talk for the first time as a grandfather, and I have another grandchild on the way in the next few weeks, which gives the subject added poignancy. What is being bequeathed to those two by me and everyone in Parliament?

In the summer I made a visit near to where the hon. Member for Stafford assiduously farms his coffee. I saw no elephants on the slopes of Kilimanjaro when I climbed it. I had a detailed look at mountaineering logs, going back over only 20 years, to find out what species those who ventured there not many years ago could see. What can be seen now? The answer is virtually nothing. Perhaps we in Parliament will do more than our little bit—something significant—for elephants and for other endangered species. I may buy for my grandkids' visits little plastic toys like I had, of lions and tigers, elephants, polar bears and other species that are in grave danger of disappearing in my lifetime, never mind theirs, or of being consigned—a handful of them—to zoos, where they are kept, desperate. Yet in this country we are major traffickers in ivory—we are the third biggest in the world.

[John Mann]

I recall 10 years ago getting through an amendment to one of the vast number of criminal justice Bills that made the trade in endangered species an imprisonable offence. There are wildlife officers in every police force in the country, but the number of successful prosecutions remains pitifully small. Yet in the antique markets and shops of this country, and on the internet—anywhere we might choose—ivory of the past and present is being traded. The figures about where it is coming from show that an extraordinary percentage is from Zambia. It is estimated that 37% of the ivory currently coming into this country is from there. Yet the European Union just last year changed its policy on ivory from Zambia. We in the western world are not getting the message about the heritage of the future.

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Did the hon. Gentleman hear it mentioned on Radio 4 this morning that even giraffes are now being put on the endangered species list? That is for meat, not ivory, and it is shocking.

**John Mann:** It is estimated that there is a 40% reduction in the giraffe population. It is such a crisis for our world, which we share—we do not own it—and which we choose to concrete over, calling it economic growth. We choose to pretend the world is purely ours, but our species will not survive if we cannot cohabit with other species. In our selfishness we are putting future generations' lives at stake, through our failure to act.

The hon. Member for Stafford is the expert on matters to do with Africa—I endorse that. He is wise in his advice to Government, and I am sure the House backs him in that. However, we can go further. There are little things we can do. Every delegation of MPs leaving this country should have a briefing about these issues in their hands, and should raise them in Africa and Asia. I raised with one of our ambassadors in central Asia the matter of the snow leopard. There are no elephants in Tajikistan, but there are snow leopards—more than anywhere else in the world. There are good people there, but there is no briefing from the Foreign Office, and the subject is not raised at ministerial level there. It is not being pressed, because it has not been part of our priority. Well, it needs to be. We have the people: we have senior royals and experienced, eloquent MPs. We should be able to do something about it.

Let us see trading standards acting in each part of the country, to find and to prosecute. Let our MPs, our ambassadors or anyone else we have abroad talk with the countries that will benefit if their indigenous species survive and thrive. Let that be significantly higher up the agenda—ours and theirs. Let the Government glory in their manifesto commitment, which is popular. There may even have been the odd vote—in constituencies other than mine—that went to their party for its wisdom in that respect. Let the policy be enacted, and swiftly, so that when we go into the negotiations on the convention on international trade in endangered species and press our case, it is on the basis that we have taken action domestically.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that too often manifestos contain commitments, such as the commitment to a

ban on wild animals in circuses, but that despite ample parliamentary time in which to discuss the issues there is endless delay, further consultation, and no concrete action from the Government?

**John Mann:** The fact of the matter is that people vote, so we spend a lot of time listening to every single request.

I want to make a final point to those who are following the debate, and those who are enthused to do something from outside Parliament: I want to get the people to rise up and make demands of us, turn the arguments into numbers, and put pressure on me, the hon. Member for Stafford and every other Member of Parliament. We need a rising up in the country, to say that we are going to do something and are not prepared to sit by—as we have all done in our lifetime—while there is a disastrous decimation of species, and while species that were not endangered in my childhood become critically endangered. Let us turn the tide and put on the pressure. I say to the Minister: be a hero.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Six hon. Members wish to speak, and I shall be calling for the winding-up speeches to begin a couple of minutes before 4 o'clock. Perhaps the House will bear that in mind, otherwise I will impose a time limit.

3.17 pm

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing and opening the debate, and commend the thoughtful contributions that he and the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) have made.

This year has seen the worst decline in the African elephant population in a quarter of a century, and it is escalating. It is estimated that only 352,271 savannah elephants are left, with approximately 120,000 illegally killed by poachers since the first Conservative manifesto commitment to close the domestic ivory market was made in 2010. I want the introduction of a near-total ban on ivory trading in the UK—one that eradicates the current pre/post-1947 divide. The only exception—this is the reason I refer to a near-total ban—would be for genuine pieces of art, of cultural value, ratified by independent experts such as museum experts. Evidence suggests that the most effective move that the UK could make to save elephants and combat illegal poaching would be closing the domestic ivory market, and that is what I am calling for.

I shall briefly outline the UK position before I explain why a near-total ban on ivory would be beneficial, primarily to boost elephant populations and prevent their slaughter, but also because it would combat criminal activity. It is supported by the public, as the hon. Member for Bassetlaw said. The Government have promised to deliver a ban, and we should keep our word.

On 21 September 2016, the UK announced a possible ban on the sale of worked ivory produced after 1947; works before that date would be considered antiques. The ban will be consulted on next year, but that is not soon enough. There is evidence that legislation can successfully combat the illegal killing of elephants. In

the US, the introduction of a near-total federal ban on ivory sales in July 2016 is already working well. Crucially, it also has support from the antiques industry; Sotheby's called the move "manageable", and stated that even when stricter legislation has been implemented, it has continued to operate successfully. The regulatory situation in the US indicates that the introduction of legislation in the UK could be effective. However, beyond that, a stronger sign is needed that more can and should be done and that more elephants can be saved without harming UK businesses.

Such measures are wholeheartedly supported by the British public. Only 8% of them are aware that it is still legal to buy and sell ivory in the UK, but 85% of them think that buying and selling ivory should be banned. It is one of our nation's great traits that we are such proud animal lovers and express enormous concern for our planet's wildlife. Introducing a near-total ban on domestic ivory would give the British people what they want: legislation to protect elephants, which are animals as majestic as any other. The Conservative party knows that people want elephants protected. In our 2010 and 2015 manifestos, we said that we would press for a total ban on ivory sales. It is right that we deliver on those commitments, because we made them.

Crucially, although public awareness about the ivory trade's legality is not huge, it does not mean that the Conservative decision not to fully implement those manifesto ambitions has gone unnoticed. Tusk, the wildlife conservation charity, criticised the Government, saying that the proposals introduced

"do not represent a near-total ban as promised".

Just three days after the consultation on the modern-day ivory ban was announced in September this year, the grassroots organisation Action for Elephants UK sent the Prime Minister a letter with 124 signatories, including Lord Hague, Stephen Hawking and the nation's beloved broadcaster and naturalist David Attenborough. Finally, a current e-petition calling for the domestic ivory market to be shut down has reached more than 75,000 signatures. A near-total ban would prove to those groups and the wider public that the Government are committed to protecting endangered species and take citizens' concerns extremely seriously.

Unfortunately, in terms of legislation—I touched on this briefly—Britain currently lags behind several countries in protecting elephants and restricting the ivory trade. Alongside the USA, China has also gone further than the UK in terms of regulation. The two countries have put in place stricter laws than are required under the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, which, although it confusingly only mentions fauna and flora in its name, aims to ensure that the international trade in wild animals does not threaten their survival.

On 20 March 2016, China imposed a three-year suspension on importing all ivory tusks and carvings. In June 2016, the Hong Kong Government introduced plans to phase out the domestic ivory trade entirely within five years, as well as bans on the import and re-export of pre-convention ivory into the territory. In the same month, the USA implemented new rules on the domestic trade in ivory, under which the commercial sale and export of ivory between US states are allowed only for certified antiques more than 100 years old.

Recent conferences, such as November's international conference in Vietnam on the illegal wildlife trade, attended by the Duke of Cambridge, Prince William, and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, are key examples of how countries' treatment of the ivory trade can be put into the global spotlight. That conference was the third conference, the first of which was hosted by the UK Government in 2014. Through the meetings, nations have committed to supporting the elephant protection initiative, which includes measures on closing domestic ivory markets. After making such pledges, Britain must take care that we are not shamed on the international stage or left behind by our neighbours. Introducing a near-total ban on ivory in the UK would prove our conviction to the world. Britain should be leading from the front, not limping behind other nations.

A more immediate and tangible reason for introducing a near-total ban than protecting British reputation is the horrendous illegal slaughter of elephants, which has reached an appalling level. The great elephant census, released in September this year, found that the number of African elephants plunged by 30%, or around 144,000, between 2007 and 2014. It is not possible to understand the scale of the slaughter without also understanding the scale of the illegal ivory trade.

**Mr Hollobone:** In an answer to my hon. Friend on 1 November, the Government said that only 111,000 African elephants had disappeared in the last 10 years. Does she share my concern that the Government are underestimating the scale of the problem?

**Pauline Latham:** Yes. I am not sure where those figures came from, but other independent people and organisations have come up with much bigger figures, and the problem is escalating. It is not at a flat level or decreasing; it is escalating. They are being killed faster and more frequently.

The illicit wildlife trade is considered the fourth most profitable international crime after drugs, arms and human trafficking. It is worth between \$10 billion and \$20 billion each year. Ivory makes up a significant proportion of that market, and an estimated 200 to 300 tonnes of illegal ivory enter the global market every year. Given the value of ivory, the brutality directed towards elephants becomes increasingly predictable, although no less despicable. The word "poaching" may conjure up the image of small, individual instances of killing, but the term does not convey the horror of frequent butchery.

In an article in *The New York Times*, Ugandan Eve Abe describes how, after Idi Amin's overthrow, both armies involved in the conflict would throw hand grenades at families of elephants and then cut out their ivory. Those armies are no longer present, but to assume that the brutal killing of those animals and the use of the profits to fund terrorist and militia activity have disappeared with them is, unfortunately, incorrect. As long as current UK legislation inadvertently helps ivory trading remain that profitable, the killing will continue.

Tragically, that killing affects more than animals. The Thin Green Line Foundation estimates that around 1,000 wildlife officers have been killed in the past decade. Not all of those deaths will have been due to ivory

[*Pauline Latham*]

poachers, but the statistic proves that there is a human as well as an animal cost from the illegal ivory trade market.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Before the hon. Lady continues with her remarks, I encourage her to finish by at least 3.30, so other hon. Members have a chance to speak.

**Pauline Latham:** Thank you, Mrs Main. I will skip the statistics that I have, although they are important. The Government have an opportunity to make a big difference to the world, not just to Britain. We have an important opportunity to discuss, and ultimately to fight, the appalling slaughter of elephants being driven by the ivory trade. We are seeing the massacre of magnificent animals that face ever-increasing threats from poaching, including potential extinction.

The largest tusks are from the oldest elephants, who are the first in herds to be killed. Elephants live in family units. If the oldest, wisest elephants are slaughtered, the unit is left incomplete, and many of the “teenage” elephants lose their role model. Just like human teenagers, they can run wild. Many of those rogue elephants can become extremely violent. The extension of the domestic ivory ban offers a simple and effective way to protect elephants, and I hope that everyone here will support it.

I have said before in this very hall that, like the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, I fear that my grandchildren and great-grandchildren may never see elephants, given the increasing scale of their deaths. I reiterate that fear today, but I hope that it is the last time I must do so.

3.29 pm

**Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing this debate on the back of a very popular petition, as well as the other hon. Members who I know have campaigned on this issue for a long time. It is clear from this debate that there is a collective will across party political lines for the UK to do more to protect the world’s elephants. As the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) said, they are the most magnificent animals.

I very much support the aims of this debate and the call for a complete ban on the domestic ivory trade in the UK. As other hon. Members have said, 30,000 elephants are still killed every year for their tusks—a death rate of one every quarter of an hour. Africa’s elephant population is in serious decline, mainly because of high levels of poaching; 30% of Africa’s elephants have disappeared in seven years. That ongoing tragedy was highlighted really well in the excellent programmes made by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. We should also appreciate the plight of endangered Asian elephants, as the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) pointed out.

The Government’s announcement in September of a ban on the sale of worked ivory produced after 1947 is a step in the right direction but, as other hon. Members have said, there is still more that can and should be done. I thank my constituent Rob Hepworth, who is a former head for the convention on international trade in endangered species and an officer for the UN convention on migratory species, for his work. I also thank all the

non-governmental organisations that briefed us for this debate on their campaigns. On Mr Hepworth’s behalf, I reiterate that it is felt that the Government’s proposals are too limited because they do not include older ivory products. Illegal ivory is often laundered and falsely claimed to be old ivory. As we have seen from the programmes and from work done by wildlife monitoring organisations, there is extensive evidence of current abuse and of ivory being smuggled to overseas markets, mainly Hong Kong.

On my constituent’s behalf, may I also raise with the Minister the Government’s actions at EU level? It is felt that they missed an important opportunity to act at the recent CITES conference in South Africa when they supported the European Commission delegation’s block vote denying maximum protection status to all African elephants. That action not only seemed to negate the pledges made in the last two Conservative manifestos to “press for a total ban on ivory sales”

but simultaneously contradicted the Foreign Secretary’s criticism of the EU Commission at the Conservative party conference, in which he slammed the “absurd” EU veto on an ivory ban. Will the Minister explain why the Government acted in that way at the conference? That would really help campaigners out there.

It would also be good to get some clarity on whether the Minister is seriously considering stricter national measures to ban the UK domestic ivory trade altogether. While we remain in the EU, it would be useful to know whether she can press Brussels to amend the binding regulations that allow unrestricted sales in allegedly antique ivory without any checks or certificates, so that in effect EU countries would have to regulate ivory sales, too.

We can change the law, but—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) asked—what consideration are the Government giving to enforcement? Will they give more resources to agencies such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs wildlife inspectorate, the national wildlife crime unit, the police and Border Force for extra enforcement support? That is really important.

Finally, on behalf of Rob Hepworth, may I ask what consideration is being given to the destruction of stockpiles? I understand that the US, France, China and African states have publicly destroyed ivory to highlight the trade. Have the Government considered that? The public certainly support more action on the ivory trade; in October, as has been mentioned, more than 100 conservationists, campaigners and politicians signed an open letter to the Government to that effect. It would be good to hear from the Minister what more we in the UK can do to lead the way and to help to secure a future for wild elephants while supporting the local communities that live alongside these extraordinary creatures.

3.34 pm

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** It is a pleasure to speak on this extremely serious subject. I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for introducing the debate.

I want to start by telling a story about an experience that convinced me that we absolutely have to do our utmost to protect these precious animals, aside from all the appalling statistics that we have heard today and

that many of us know so well. This summer, I was fortunate enough to go to the northern part of Kenya. My husband and I stayed in a camp called Sarara on Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust land in 75,000 acres of glorious countryside. Pretty much all the camp's profits are ploughed back into the community and into protecting the wildlife and habitats of which elephants are a key part.

Let me give some of the background history. The northern districts of Kenya were at the centre of mass elephant poaching in the 1980s: hundreds of elephants were killed for their ivory and the population was virtually wiped out. People soon realised that the wildlife had no future unless the communities themselves could participate in its protection, including by protecting the land, which was becoming eroded and over-grazed. To succeed, a presence had to be established in the bush to deter poachers and protect the elephant population and the local communities had to be convinced that the wildlife was not competition for food but a source of income. Initially, the local herdsmen were provided with radios so that they could report poaching incidents. As time went on, the community began to understand the benefits of having wildlife on their land. Visitors like my husband and I who were interested in the wildlife could be used as a source of income. The Samburu people of Namunyak have learned that, correctly managed, the land can generate a more sustainable income for the community and also protect the elephant herds and their habitats.

On our visit, we were also fortunate to go to the opening of a unique elephant sanctuary that was set up by the people of the community with a lot of guidance from very good consultants and charities working there. It is an elephant orphanage; some of the elephants it gathers up have fallen down wells, but others have become orphans because their parents have been killed by poaching. It is an essential establishment.

I want to highlight a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham): when an elephant is poached, it affects not just that one elephant but the entire herd. Elephants are deeply intelligent and emotional creatures; losing one member can devastate the herd's whole set-up. It is like a family member being knocked off. Elephants live in fluid, intergenerational, predominantly female herds and flourish under leadership. The matriarch is often the elephant that is killed, because it is the biggest, the grandest-looking and the one the poachers want, and losing it can confuse the herd. Their roaming patterns change and that can be the difference between life and death for elephants. Understanding the deep intelligence of these creatures makes killing them for a tiny part of their body for jewellery even more abhorrent.

There are documented examples of elephants swimming across a river to Namibia by night, where they eat as much vegetation as they can and—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Could the hon. Lady bring her remarks back to the UK ivory trade? Other Members want to speak; background information is very interesting, but time is short.

**Rebecca Pow:** Thank you, Mrs Main. I will move straight on to the ivory trade; I was just illustrating why it is so shocking and why I am calling for the ban to be

extended. A complete ban on all ivory sales would make such a difference to these deeply sensitive and intelligent creatures.

I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to a consultation, but I gently remind the Minister that a pledge to ban all ivory sales in the UK has been in the Conservative manifesto for some time. I urge her to shed some light on how we might move that forward. I know that many believe in the status quo and the ban on post-1947 ivory to discourage poached ivory arriving in the UK market, but I do not believe that those measures would do the trick. Allowing any ivory trade at all leaves a place for illegal ivory to be hidden. There are ways of making modern ivory look old, as was recognised recently at the International Union for Conservation of Nature's world conservation congress, which voted to close down domestic ivory markets around the world.

Some will argue that we should take care of the small number of antique dealers in this country whose trade potentially relies on ivory. I understand that tests can be carried out to try to prove whether ivory is pre or post-1947, but they are costly and take a long time, and they are often not actually carried out. It falls to the UK's Border Force to police the ivory trade. Shockingly, over the past five years, 40% of its seizures have been ivory. Good work is also done by the national wildlife crime unit, and I applaud the Government for saving it recently, because its work is invaluable.

I am winding up now, Mrs Main, but you may remember that I mentioned those elephants swimming to Namibia. They swam from Botswana, which is a safe haven because it signed up to the elephant protection initiative. I wonder why, when we are urging other countries to join such initiatives, we do not share their values, join the initiatives and ban our highly damaging domestic ivory market. We can do that quite simply. It would be cheap, and we would have enormous public support. We could prove that, yet again, we are a world leader, and take a stand against organised crime and the dreadful poaching that has had such a terrible knock-on effect in many of the countries we have been discussing. Some good news is that Stop Ivory has commissioned a legal opinion, which states that only secondary legislation would be required for a complete ban to be enacted. I would be happy to share that opinion with the Minister.

To conclude, as I said earlier, I welcome the Government's consultation on this issue. I urge the Minister to ensure that the Government consult on a ban on all ivory sales so that we can move towards a complete ivory ban. We cannot carry on as we are; it is much too high a price for our precious elephants to pay.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call Margaret Ferrier, I should inform the other Members who wish to speak that there is now a six-minute limit on speeches.

3.41 pm

**Margaret Ferrier** (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairship, Mrs Main. I thank the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for securing this important debate, and

[Margaret Ferrier]

pay tribute to the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) for her efforts. I was only too happy to support her, given that previously I have failed in several applications for a Westminster Hall debate on the same topic.

I, along with many of my SNP colleagues, have been particularly passionate about the ivory trade. Indeed, earlier this year, my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) tabled an early-day motion calling on the UK Government to fulfil their pledge to ban the domestic ivory trade. Although the Government's recent announcement of a ban on non-antique ivory is welcome, I urge them to build on that and go a step further. Some would argue that the new ban is a watered-down version of the Government's manifesto commitment to

"press for a total ban on ivory sales",

which was itself arguably a watered-down version of the 2010 manifesto pledge not only to introduce a ban, but to press for

"the destruction of existing stockpiles".

The International Fund for Animal Welfare warns that the demand for ivory to make decorative items, jewellery and trinkets is pushing elephants to the brink of extinction. That sobering fact is reason in itself to show the trade zero tolerance. Although the IFAW welcomes the partial ban as a

"positive step in the right direction",

it is continuing to urge the Government to introduce a total ban on domestic ivory sales, as it believes that such a measure is vital to help to shut down the markets in the UK. Most people will be unaware of this fact, but the UK actually has the largest legal domestic ivory market in Europe. Information obtained from the Border Force and the Metropolitan police indicates that the UK is home to a significant illegal market. Furthermore—the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) referred to this briefly—there is evidence to suggest that some traders attempt to stain or disguise newer items in order to pass them off as antiques. It is for that very reason that a total ban is imperative.

The ban on the sale of worked ivory produced after 1947, although welcome, still enables a rogue trade in such items. It is simply not effective enough. A total ban is required if we are truly to stamp out the trade. The other effect of a total ban would be to make ivory undesirable and socially unacceptable. Ivory should not be viewed as a commodity, and should have absolutely zero monetary value. The real cost of ivory is the extinction of elephants from our planet. Too many elephants suffer horrific deaths that are totally needless. It is important to put a number to that. We are not talking about a handful of elephants here; we are looking at around 100,000 over the past three years. If more people understood the sheer scale of the trade, I am sure there would be greater public uproar.

The UK should be leading the way and providing an example to the rest of the world. Time is running short for elephants. We need to see further action from the Government, building on the work already done. I would like to see the Government undertake a consultation on how to close the ivory market, looking at our domestic and international obligations. The ban needs to be

strengthened to fulfil properly the Conservative manifesto commitment to ban the domestic trade. That must include ending the sale of pre-1947 ivory. I look forward to the Government's response to the points raised today, and thank the Minister for her consideration of this matter.

3.45 pm

**Victoria Borwick** (Kensington) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I declare that I am president of the British Antique Dealers' Association. I have also been advised by the British Art Market Federation, the Antiquities Dealers' Association and LAPADA, which together comprise a group of Britain's most knowledgeable and highly regarded auction houses and specialist dealers in fine art, antiques and the decorative arts. I hope that this timely debate, secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), will provide an opportunity to discuss a number of misunderstandings.

As the MP for Kensington, my constituency includes antique dealers and institutions containing world-renowned collections of cultural objects—notably, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Natural History Museum and the Science Museum, all of which have worked ivory and other natural materials in their collections. The V&A houses not only medieval and baroque ivory, but ivory from the early 20th century.

The most important point I need to make is that the antiques trade does not support the killing of elephants, nor does it support any system that allows raw ivory from post-1947 sources to be traded. I emphasise that all the dealers and auctioneers I have spoken to are deeply concerned about the plight of African elephants and deplore their slaughter. They, and the vast majority of antiques collectors, want nothing to do with items made from modern or poached ivory. They welcome the tougher measures proposed by the Minister to remove from sale objects that are little more than tourist trinkets made in the past few decades. Even more importantly, we would all welcome a ban on the export and trading of raw tusks from other EU member states. We have already led the field by banning them ourselves some time ago.

The UK has the second largest art and antiques industry in the world. Collectively, the pool of expertise represented by all those businesses throughout the UK amounts to a resource that is unsurpassed by any other country. Visitors flock to these shores to sell or acquire artworks. Our museums rely on and work with the trade to continue to develop their collections. In fact, at a meeting a few months ago representatives of the V&A explained how they are still enhancing their collections of significant 20th century ivory pieces.

Ivory has been used in European decorative arts for centuries. I have available and can pass around a document compiled by the British Art Market Federation that gives some examples. Antique items containing ivory, such as musical instruments, can be found in the homes of many people in Britain. One of the great misunderstandings about the antiques trade is when people regard all ivory as part of an ivory market; however, the purchaser of a carved ivory medieval Christian diptych who wants the ivory because it is a beautifully worked, culturally and historically significant

piece that happens to be made of ivory is not the same as a buyer of modern-day trinkets. To ban the sale of an 18th-century cabinet inlaid with small pieces of ivory, or the sale of an 18th-century portrait miniature painted on a thin sliver of ivory, in order to stop far eastern buyers purchasing contemporary carved Buddhas or trinkets, makes no sense. We need to be intelligent enough to differentiate the two.

The majority of ivory buyers in the far east appear not to be interested in objects of cultural significance. What they want is ivory as a material, and thus we must distinguish between raw tusks and antique objects. In places such as Hong Kong, which is a destination for illegally poached tusks, illicit tusks can be mixed with older tusks, which continue to be exported by some European countries. The EU has plans to introduce a total ban on the export of raw tusks, and the sooner such a ban is implemented the better.

No one has so far demonstrated that genuine antiques containing ivory, of the type sold in the UK and found in our museums, contribute in any material way to the sale of poached ivory in the far east. The World Wide Fund for Nature-backed TRAFFIC report concluded that

“alleged links between the UK antiques trade and the poaching crisis appear tenuous at best”.

In conclusion, the antiques trade in the UK has made it clear that it welcomes working with my hon. Friend the Minister to develop the further regulations that may be necessary to remove from sale post-1947 items, which will effectively be a ban, because it is very important that we all understand the difference. We all welcome greater checks to ensure that only genuine antique items are sold—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. I call Dr Lisa Cameron.

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship, Mrs Main. It is also an absolute pleasure to speak in such a profound—

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. I apologise; I am sorry. I call Fiona Bruce for the last few minutes before the Front-Bench speeches. Sorry about that.

3.52 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Thank you, Mrs Main.

On 24 September 2016, the third annual global march for elephants and rhinos took place, with people from 140 cities worldwide uniting to call for a ban on the trade in ivory and horn, and to demand that action be taken to end the irretrievable damage caused by the acquisition and trade of ivory. I commend the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for securing the debate and support him in his call for Members to recognise the irrevocable damage that will be caused both to elephant species and to individuals' livelihoods if action is not taken.

I particularly commend the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham). She articulated so well how a near-total ban on ivory trade is the way ahead. I very much support such a ban and, as I say, she expressed very well how an

“intelligent” differentiation can be made, to use the word of my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick), between museum pieces and genuine antique objects and other ivory, so that we can not only ensure that there is that distinction but at the same time put an end to and cut off the source of funding for the brutal killers who are poaching elephants in Africa and elsewhere.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire mentioned, a survey of elephants in August 2016—the great elephant census—showed the severe fall in the number of African elephants. The figures that have been mentioned in the debate vary, but it is clear that there has been a severe decline. If the current level of poaching in Africa continues, elephants could be all but extinct by 2030, and certain species will experience an extreme decline even earlier. For example, the African forest elephant has declined by 65% since 2002, giving it only another decade before extinction. The gravity of the need to act on the ivory trade is undeniable.

However, the different species of African elephants are not the only victims of the ivory trade. I saw that on a visit to Tanzania about two years ago, when I was privileged to be invited to go on a safari. We saw many, many animals, but we saw no elephants, and the guide explained to us that the decline in elephants was a serious deterrent to tourists visiting the area, which would have an increasing impact on the jobs and livelihoods of the people living in that area unless something was done.

Those of us on the International Development Committee—including my hon. Friends the Members for Stafford and for Mid Derbyshire, and others who are here today—know that this is a critical issue to be addressed in Africa today, particularly for the younger generation. I particularly ask that the Department for International Development considers whether there is more that it could do to support those dealing with this issue in the countries in which we are spending UK aid.

The responsibility that Britain must take in tackling the ivory trade cannot be ignored. The domestic market means that there is a transition point in the UK for the trading of ivory, with import and re-export occurring. Between 2009 and 2014, 40% of seizures by the UK Border Force were of ivory items.

There has been some progress. I am pleased to see the Government's commitment to doubling their £13 million investment to tackle the illegal ivory trade and the endeavour to train a British military anti-poaching force. Those are bold and leading measures to tackle the problem, but more must be done. I join other Members in asking the Government to take further steps to close the ivory market, in order to rid Britain of the status of a transitional market for the trade of ivory, and to impose a near-total ivory ban.

In recent years, international collaboration has been very encouraging. I welcome the announcements by the USA and China within the past year regarding the banning of the ivory trade, and more recently the announcements by Hong Kong and France. I urge the Government to join that international movement and to recognise the urgency of action on the ivory trade. Without a near-total ban on the ivory trade in the UK, we will neglect not only to counteract the rapid decline of African elephants but to support the livelihoods of many people in developing countries who have been

[Fiona Bruce]

crippled by the ivory market. It would be to the shame of our country, and indeed our Government, if we lagged behind other countries that are currently taking a lead on tackling this issue.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** I call Dr Lisa Cameron. As the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Lady has 10 minutes. I apologise for getting her jumping to her feet a little earlier.

3.57 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairpersonship once again so soon, Mrs Main.

I am privileged to speak in such a profound and important debate. First, I commend the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for bringing this issue to the House. He has great experience and speaks from the heart. I also thank the International Fund for Animal Welfare, the Born Free Foundation, the World Wide Fund for Nature, Tusk and many other organisations and agencies that work so hard to conserve the wonderful, majestic elephant population of our world.

The hon. Gentleman outlined with great veracity the need for this debate; the need to stop the decline in elephant numbers, which are currently at 400,000 to 450,000; the grave issues that exist regarding poaching; the emergency of the situation that we face internationally; his own personal experience in Africa, in Tanzania and beyond; the need to end the ivory trade now, in fulfilment of the Conservative party election pledges; and the global need for education campaigns for children, to spread the word.

I also thank the esteemed and hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) for his contribution. He spoke, as always, with great emotion. He spoke about the people's petition and the people's voice—the people who assert the need to save endangered species for the sake of the next generation. He made the excellent point that we want to conserve elephants in the world and not just visit them in zoos. He also described the important issues that MPs have a responsibility to raise on every delegation visit we have to countries where there are endangered species. MPs, ambassadors, Ministers and the United Kingdom Government can and must do more.

There was an eloquent contribution from the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham), who I know feels especially strongly about this issue and who will work hard, as always, to achieve concrete results. She raised the important issue of combating criminal activity as part of the overall strategy and emphasised the urgent need for action. She wants to see the UK be a role model and lead the world on taking this issue forward, because currently we are falling behind. She also raised the important issue of the escalation in the illicit wildlife trade.

The hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) made an excellent contribution, as always. She informed the Chamber that 30% of Africa's elephants have disappeared. She raised the issue of the UK Government's action at EU level, which has sadly been lacking. She asked about the destruction of stockpiles and the Government's lack of action to date in that regard.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) made a thoughtful contribution. She spoke about her experience of the majestic elephant and of visits to elephant sanctuaries, and about the importance of tourism to local livelihoods and sustainability.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) urged the UK Government to take steps towards implementing a total ban on ivory. She highlighted that the cost of ivory is the extinction of elephants from our planet.

**Pauline Latham:** The hon. Lady mentions all these things and asks what the Government are going to do, but they have said that they plan to widen the UK ban on ivory sales. Would she like the Minister to respond to that point and explain exactly what it means?

**Dr Cameron:** Yes, I would like the Minister to explain in detail what the Government mean to do on the issue.

The hon. Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) gave a perspective from her constituency regarding antiques dealers and museums. She indicated that antiques dealers would welcome tough measures on the sale of ivory and are aware of the plight of the elephant population across the world. They advocate a ban on the export of tusks.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce)—I nearly made my speech before she had even had a chance to speak—made a measured speech, as always. She emphasised the severe decline in the elephant population and spoke about the International Development Committee's work, to which she has dedicated herself. She raised the important issue of jobs and livelihoods and asked that the Department for International Development does more to protect wildlife in the countries in which it is active.

This year, my two-year-old daughter saw an elephant for the very first time. It was an amazing experience that she will never forget, and I want future generations of children to be able to behold that sight. Time is of the essence. We must act now. If we do not, elephants could face localised extinction. In some African countries, including Senegal, Somalia and Sudan, elephants have already been driven to extinction. Communities across Africa are dependent on elephants for income through tourism, so saving elephants also means preventing poverty, sustaining livelihoods and promoting sustainable tourism.

Elephants are a key species in the ecosystem, and many other animals rely on them for survival. Elephants are nature's gardeners. Plants and trees rely on them to disperse seeds. Elephants, as has been mentioned, are intelligent and emotional. They grieve for lost ones and feel fear and joy. We must stem demand for ivory from consumer countries. That is fundamental to the survival of the species. Up to 100 elephants are killed by organised criminals every day. In the past 10 years, 1,000 rangers have been killed by poachers.

**Mrs Anne Main (in the Chair):** Order. Will the hon. Lady bring her remarks to a close? There are two Front Benchers still to go.

**Dr Cameron:** We need conviction rates and justice systems to be strengthened.

I ask that we protect and preserve elephants for the world. If the UK Government do not take steps to act on such a fundamental issue, we must question their fitness to represent the United Kingdom across the world.

4.3 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mrs Main. I start by thanking the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) for providing such an excellent exposition of the plight of elephants today and the causes of the mass slaughter and butchering of those majestic animals. He has been joined by many Members from both sides of the House also pleading for a total ban on the trade in ivory. That feeling does not just exist in the House; we know that 85% of the public want to see a total ban on the trade in ivory, and we heard that only 8% know that trading continues in this country. It is therefore incumbent on us to listen to the public and what they are calling for. The petition is gathering pace. It has more than 76,000 signatures, and I am sure it will have many more after today's debate. They are calling for a total ban, not a partial ban.

I thank the NGOs for the fantastic work they do in raising awareness of this dreadful issue. Save the Elephants, the World Wildlife Fund, the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Tusk and many more are ensuring that the issue is placed in our consciousness and that we know the impact the ivory trade is having. Of course, that impact is not just on the elephant community; we have heard how 1,000 of the rangers who dedicate their lives to saving those wonderful creatures have lost their lives as a result of the criminal activity we are witnessing across the globe. Progress must be made, and I trust that—as my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) said, it is happening on our watch and this is our opportunity—today we will see progress from the Minister in ensuring that we go further and see a complete ban on the trade in ivory.

In preparing for today's debate, I have been distressed to read about the mass slaughter of those wonderful animals. In the past year, 33,000 elephants were consigned to their end. For what? For greed, money and criminal activity. We have a duty to stand up for those wonderful animals. Of course, it is not just about the elephant; we have heard today about giraffes—there are now fewer than 100,000 giraffes—and about snow leopards. At the turn of the last century, there were half a million rhinos. Today, there are just 29,000. They have been traded for blood money. It is therefore incumbent on us to ensure that no more elephants lose their lives.

The clock is ticking. In the course of this debate, six more elephants will be murdered. The time for consultation is over; it is time for action, and we must start today. We need the Government to make firm commitments and to be accountable for them. The reality is that the battle is being lost. If we do not make more progress, and quickly, it will be too late and our children and grandchildren will not witness elephants in the wild. That will happen within a generation, so it is so important that we move the debate forward.

We have had opportunities on the global stage. I will not be critical—it is very difficult to bring global progress—but we have to show leadership with those opportunities.

The Government have clearly made commitments, but we want to see them fulfilled, not just in the UK, but on the global stage. They should not stand back from those commitments to move forward; they should show leadership and take people along with them, whether at CITES conferences or in Hanoi.

I have spoken to the general of the 1st (United Kingdom) Division of the Army—it is based in my constituency and long may it remain there—about using our armed forces and their skill to protect elephants in Africa. We would welcome such steps because, clearly, this is a war against mass criminality. We need to take such actions and use our skills.

Can the Minister tell me the difference between ivory of 1946 and of 1948? Elephants fell to their deaths in 1946 and 1948, so what is the difference in the false demarcation of 1947? Authorities and dealers cannot tell the difference. We have heard that only carbon dating can provide the necessary identification. The demarcation is false, so why draw that line? Why not just say, “Pre-1947 and post-1947 ivory will be banned”? We will support the Government if they take that forward. We want to know from the Minister why the Government will not address the antique ivory trade. What is so different?

The remarks of the hon. Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) were objectionable. She referred to a beautifully worked piece, but it was a beautiful elephant once. She called it artwork. What is artistic about murder? Although those pieces are already in existence, they should no longer be traded. We would introduce a total ban on all ivory, with no excuses and no demarcations—a clear and simple ban. We call for leadership from the Government on this issue.

I agree with Action for Elephants UK, which states:

“The existence of a legal ivory trade serves as a cover for illegal sales of ivory, while continuing to perpetuate the cycle of supply and demand.”

We must see a ban on historical and new ivory, and I call on the Government to close the ivory loophole today and for the Minister to be bold enough to do that, on her watch and while she has the power to make the difference around the globe. Tougher penalties are needed for those who break the law and education campaigns should coincide with that, as well as an amnesty on those that possess ivory in their own homes, so that they can get rid of those products, which are not beautiful artworks but products paid for by the blood of animals.

Let us get on top of the cyber trade too. Let us get on top of the reality of the issue and see a total ban. In our time in Europe, let us use our influence while it remains to see European countries coming behind our leadership on this issue. At the moment, France is ahead of us. We know that the US, too, has tougher penalties. We have to play catch-up. We also have to listen to countries such as Botswana, where the largest elephant population lives, which is also calling for a total ban. We have to listen to those that know best.

This is not just a fight for the future of elephants and rhinos and so many animals—it is a fight against organised criminality. That is why it is so important that we as a country step up and refuse to tolerate any of it. Where there are loopholes and confusion, which is what the Government measures will bring, criminality will continue, because that is what criminals do. I ask the Minister to please join us—the 85% of people across our country

[*Rachael Maskell*]

and hon. Members today—and call for a total ban. It is on her watch and she has the ability to make the change. I trust she will.

4.11 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Main. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) on securing this debate. As has already been pointed out, nearly 77,000 people have signed the petition calling for a total ban and I am sure that the Petitions Committee has linked that to this debate.

Hon. Members have spoken with passion. We have heard about the trade in ivory and its links to the trafficking of poached ivory. That is what it comes back to—the horrific poaching of elephants that is currently taking place. We all agree that it has to stop; we will not stand aside while there is the threat of extinction.

Many hon. Members have expressed their love of elephants, and I admit to that too. In 1977, I saw the appropriately named Jubilee in Chester zoo, and earlier this year I visited South Africa to attend the Conference of the Parties to the convention on international trade in endangered species and saw in Kruger national park elephants roaming wild, as they should be.

One Member asked about international aid. The reason I went to Kruger national park was to see the work being done with UK taxpayers' money through the aid system to train rangers to prevent the poaching of rhinos. In South Africa, there seems to have been a measure of success; instead of three rhinos being poached a day, we now have one rhino being poached a day. That is some success, but those are still horrific figures.

**Kerry McCarthy:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Dr Coffey:** I will not yet—I need to open my speech. The Government are absolutely committed to taking the action needed and showing the required leadership to end the poaching crisis.

A lot of statistics have been cited today, several of which I do not recognise. I would be happy to understand them further. It is my understanding that, at its peak in 2011, it was estimated that 30,000 African elephants were slaughtered in a year for their tusks, based on extrapolations from data from 12 key sites. The International Union for Conservation of Nature reported the loss of 111,000 in the great elephant census, which was announced at the recent CITES COP and was the basis of the parliamentary answer that I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham). The 2014 African elephant census, which is collated by a different organisation, provides the most recent and comprehensive data and indicates a 30% fall in the savannah elephant population in a seven-year period between 2007 and 2014. That equates to 144,000 elephants.

**Pauline Latham:** Does it really matter what the statistics are? It is a few thousand here or a few thousand there. They are being slaughtered and bloody corpses are on the ground.

**Dr Coffey:** My hon. Friend is right—that is why I alluded to that point in the opening of my speech—but I want to make sure that we are clear in the assertions that are made. I do not recognise some of the statistics to which she refers. The general consensus is that the levels of poaching peaked in 2011 to 2013, but I agree that one poached elephant is one too many. I fully accept that.

What the overall numbers hide is the vastly different experiences across the African continent. Tanzania has been particularly hit hard by poaching, especially in the Selous region, with a reported decline of more than 60,000 elephants, which is a significant part of the population. Conversely, the experience in other parts of Africa, especially in the southern states, is of a stable or growing population. For example, in the Hwange national park in Zimbabwe, the population is growing and the Government report that they are beginning to suffer the problems of overpopulation, including habitat destruction.

The hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) referred to the EU. Our Government's view is that the large and growing elephant populations in southern Africa did not meet the clear, scientific criteria established in CITES for inclusion in appendix I of the convention. Moreover, moving those populations to appendix I would have had no impact on the status of the ivory from those four countries, or the concern that trade might resume in the future. Their existing appendix II listings have an annotation that effectively treats ivory from those countries as if it were in appendix I. Such a move could in fact have been counter-productive. It was strongly thought that Zimbabwe, Namibia and possibly more countries would have taken out a reservation against any move to appendix I. Two countries taking out such a reservation would have resulted in ivory being able to be traded without contravening CITES and so would have potentially reopened commercial trade in new ivory with immediate effect.

A range of solutions is needed to tackle the poaching crisis and CITES, which also covers both fauna and flora, is an important part of that. I recognise that this debate is about the UK ivory trade, but we should be conscious that many species were added to appendix I, including sharks and rosewood. The illegal wildlife trade covers far more than just the ivory to which we are referring today.

I assure hon. Members that the UK was an active participant in discussions to give a clear direction to close national ivory markets where they fuel poaching or illegal trade. That was an outcome we strongly endorse. There was also decisive action to strengthen national ivory action plans—I have met Ministers from China and Vietnam and we have discussed those matters—which set out clear actions for countries to combat ivory trafficking in key markets, with scrutiny of achievements by the CITES community up to and including trade sanctions for inaction.

The current global rules under CITES are that trade in ivory dating from after 1990 is banned. There is no time limit to that. To change that would require a positive decision by two thirds of the CITES parties to embrace trade in ivory, which is not a realistic prospect. The UK has already for a number of years gone further than CITES requirements. We do not permit exports of any ivory tusks, given the very obvious potential for such international trade to be used to launder recently poached ivory tusks.

The rules around what trade in ivory is permitted are only part of the story and how they are enforced is an essential element. Within the UK, the existing legal trade is enforced by the police forces and the Border Force. Ivory is a top priority for the Border Force's wildlife trafficking team. The petition for today's debate notes that 40% of UK customs seizures between 2009 and 2014 were ivory, which is 40% of seized wildlife products, not of all items seized by customs. Given the priority and resources that the Border Force target on intercepting illegal ivory, I would expect that to form a significant proportion of their seizures, as the evidence shows.

Border Force has run specific operations targeting ivory in recent years and Operation Quiver, which specifically targeted illegal ivory in the parcel system, won the WWF enforcement operation of the year award last month. The expertise of our Border Force team is held in high regard globally and the UK has recently been asked to lead work at EU level on enforcement action against ivory trafficking. Interpol attended CITES for the first time. I have already met my hon. Friend the Security Minister and we intend to visit the wildlife crime unit early next year to reinforce our belief that this is an important matter that must be tackled.

Within the UK, enforcement is led by various police forces and supported by the national wildlife crime unit. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has provided additional resources in this spending review period to target illegal trade via the internet, which we know is an issue of growing concern. As I say, I intend to visit the unit early next year.

Globally, the UK is a strong supporter of enforcement efforts to combat poaching and trafficking, and we committed £4 million to the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime. The five partner organisations are at the forefront of supporting global enforcement efforts. Interpol is taking an increasingly active role in the cause, and we are partnering with it to focus on intercepting illegal shipments of ivory, rhino horn and other illegal wildlife products. Through those initiatives, we will have a real impact on the volume of trafficked ivory.

The driver for poaching is, of course, the lucrative profits that can be made in trafficking ivory. I learned on my trip to South Africa that somebody can earn in one night what they could earn in five years if they did a different job. It is important to bear that in mind when we think about the economic growth and development that we should be encouraging those countries to pursue. Where possible, we should use our aid to encourage alternatives, but not every country in Africa is eligible for overseas development aid.

Poaching is driven by the demand for ivory products. We must understand and address that problem. We need to raise Asian consumers' awareness of the devastating impact they have on elephant populations. We need to inform and engage with them, and ultimately change their behaviour. His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge showed leadership when he visited Hanoi recently, alongside my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. That kind of engagement is a key part of what UK leadership can do.

To achieve that, we need to change the dynamics of the market. We need to reduce not just the availability of ivory, but the acceptability of the trade. That is why

in the UK we are looking at our own market. Other countries, such as the US, have taken action. We want concerted international action. Most important, we want China to take action to follow through on its commitment to close its market.

Hon. Members referred to a number of other countries, so it is worth setting out what their plans involve. The US has introduced what it describes as a near-complete ban: a prohibition on trade in items under 100 years old. That is 30 years further back than the limit we have proposed, but it is a rolling date, so it will progressively allow trade in newer items year by year. The US also included a range of exemptions from the ban, including musical instruments and items containing less than 200 grams of ivory if it is less than 50% of the overall item. Those are federal rules that apply to exports and trade between states. Trade within states is a matter for the individual states to legislate on. A small number of states, although some of them are highly populous, have adopted tighter controls along similar lines to the federal controls, but they remain the minority.

We welcome the Chinese Government's announcement of their intention to close China's domestic ivory market, and we look forward to hearing more detail about their intentions for the ban. Earlier this year, France announced that it will permit trade in pre-1975 ivory only on a case-by-case basis, although we and others are still seeking clarity on what the criteria for the case-by-case assessment are, so we can understand how restrictive its approach will be. We understand it intends to consult shortly to clarify the rules and exemptions.

I am proud that in September the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced plans for banning the sale of ivory that is less than 70 years old—dating from 1947. That is an important step. The 1947 date has its foundations in EU regulations, which still remain the overarching legislation for the implementation of CITES in the UK. From a control and enforcement perspective, there are advantages to working with a date that is already used by the rest of the EU and traders to draw a dividing line. We will consult early in the new year on our plans to implement such a ban. I am pleased that it has happened on the watch of this Prime Minister and the Secretary of State.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Pauline Latham:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Dr Coffey:** I want to cover as many of the points that were raised as I can. If I have time at the end, I will give way.

We will also consult on putting into legislation our existing administrative ban on exports of raw ivory. In June, the UK pushed the European Council to urge all member states to end the trade in raw ivory in its conclusions, although they are yet to be implemented by many member states. The Council conclusions also considered other measures to go further. I assure hon. Members that our plan means that the UK will have some of the strictest rules governing ivory trade in the world. It is part of our manifesto commitment to press for a total ban.

As has been said, over the centuries, ivory has been used in a wide variety of different products and artefacts. It is easy to think of ornaments and trinkets made

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

solely of ivory but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) said, it is also used as part of decorative items and instruments, including piano keys, violin bows and sets of bagpipes. As a matter of good policy making, we need to understand better the impact that potentially banning the trade in all those different types of items will have, including on the businesses, museums and individuals who own such items. Therefore, as part of the consultation, we will have a call for evidence on those points.

**John Mann:** I hope the Minister is not turning into a liberal. There is a manifesto commitment and a consultation. Will the Minister recommend the Conservative party manifesto commitment in that consultation?

**Dr Coffey:** The Conservative party manifesto commitment—a commitment that I do not think Labour has ever included in its manifestos—is to press for a total ban on ivory sales, and that is part of the action that this policy fulfils.

The currently legal trade is only one part of the picture. We need a truly global response to all aspects of the problem if we are successfully to end the poaching crisis, and the UK leads the way in several of those areas. Just last week, I met CITES secretary-general John Scanlon, who commended the UK's excellent work in leading the international illegal wildlife trade agenda and cited the 2014 London conference as a turning point for action. We provided financial and practical support to Vietnam to host the recent illegal wildlife trade conference in Hanoi, which built on the 2014 London conference, and we supported its successor in Botswana in 2016. To maintain global momentum, the UK will host the next high-level event in London in 2018.

Two years ago, we launched a £13 million fund to invest in projects around the world that tackle the illegal wildlife trade at its root. In Hanoi, the Secretary of State announced an additional £13 million to fund new measures, doubling our investment. We provide practical support on the ground. The British military trains anti-poaching rangers on the front line in Gabon, which is home to Africa's largest population of forest elephants. That will be extended to provide training to anti-poaching rangers in other crucial countries such as Malawi. As I said, we continue to work with our partners using the UK Border Force, and the Crown Prosecution Service supports the judicial system in key states such as Kenya and Tanzania. We also support projects in Asia to raise awareness and educate potential consumers about the damage that is being done by demand for a whole range of wildlife products, including ivory.

On artworks, the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) made some very strong points. She seemed to commit the Labour party to banning leather products, because she suggested that anything made from animals should be banned. We need to think carefully about how artworks in museums are considered. People may not realise that the Lewis chessmen are ivory, but we should consider whether museums should

continue to display ivory tusks. That is the kind of thing that we should discourage them from doing.

I need to leave time for my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford, so in conclusion, I can assure—

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister give way on the question that I asked her directly to answer?

**Dr Coffey:** Very briefly.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister explain why she will not extend the ban from 1947 to an earlier date?

**Dr Coffey:** I heard the hon. Lady's question and I explained that, so she clearly was not listening.

To clarify, the manifesto commitment is that we will press for a total ban on ivory sales. That means acting on our domestic ivory trade and pressing for truly global and concerted action across all areas necessary to success. That means ensuring more effective enforcement, strengthening criminal justice, tackling the demand that is driving poaching, and supporting communities that are impacted by the effects of poaching. In all those areas, the Government are acting and showing true global leadership. I will ensure that, on my watch, we press on with such measures and continue to act so future generations can enjoy these majestic creatures roaming wild.

4.28 pm

**Jeremy Lefroy:** I thank the Minister for her reply and all right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken. Given the amount of time left, I will not list everyone, but I am most grateful for the interest shown in this debate.

The point I want to make is that we should work towards shutting down the domestic ivory market in the UK. The weight of opinion is on that side, as is the weight of evidence, although I listened carefully to what my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Victoria Borwick) said.

I respectfully suggest to the Minister that she widen the consultation early next year to cover all possible scenarios, including a total ban and a near-total ban with the kind of exemptions to which I referred in my speech, such as those that the WWF suggested—cutlery, musical instruments and furniture with inlaid ivory. Widening the consultation does not commit the Government, but it would show a willingness to take the various arguments into account.

We face an emergency; we need emergency measures. We cannot simply go on consulting and consulting. I welcome the practical action that the Government have taken in providing support to Malawi and elsewhere—by the way, pretty much every African country is eligible for ODA, which can be given to all middle or low-income countries.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the UK ivory trade.

4.30 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Thursday 8 December 2016

## BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

### Implementing Geological Disposal: Annual Report

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Jesse Norman):** I am pleased to announce today the publication of the sixth annual report of the Government's implementing geological disposal programme. The programme is focused on implementing the geological disposal of higher activity radioactive waste.

The UK Government remain firmly committed to geological disposal as the right policy for the long-term safe and secure management of higher activity radioactive waste, and continue to favour an approach that is based on the willingness of local communities to participate in the siting process.

The publication of the "Implementing Geological Disposal" White Paper in July 2014 set out the policy framework for the future implementation of geological disposal in the UK. Government have been progressing the "Initial Actions" set out in the White Paper, and formal discussions between interested communities and the developer will begin once the "Initial Actions" are complete.

The sixth annual report can be found at: <http://www.gov.uk/beis>. I have also written to the Chairs of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee and the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, and I have made available copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS332]

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Contingent Liability

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch):** A minute has been laid before Parliament regarding the funding for Olympic and Paralympic sport via UK Sport, and specifically in relation to incurring a contingent liability.

UK Sport funds Olympic and Paralympic sports and athletes from a mixture of grant in aid and income from the national lottery, and makes its decisions on which sports and which athletes to support at the beginning of each Olympic and Paralympic cycle. Uncertainty around the level of national lottery income in future years means that the UK Sport may need to make decisions based on conservative assumptions of lottery income. This could impact the number of sports and the number of athletes that could be supported between now and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo in 2020.

To avoid this the Department for Culture, Media and Sport intends to provide, from its available funds, an underwrite of UK Sport's expected national lottery income so that should it fall below a certain level, the Department will provide additional funding to allow Team GB and Paralympics GB to be properly supported in Tokyo.

This exceptional measure for the current spending review period acknowledges that UK Sport relies on future revenues to agree funding packages now, at the beginning of the next Olympic and Paralympic cycle, to allow the most talented athletes and sports men and women to achieve success at Tokyo.

The Treasury has approved the proposal, and if the liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal Supply procedure. This will be funded from within existing DCMS control totals and only applies up to the end of the current spending review period in 2019-20. A full departmental minute has been laid providing more detail on this contingent liability.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2016-12-08/HCWS337/>

[HCWS337]

## DEFENCE

### Offshore Patrol Vessels

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Harriett Baldwin):** I am pleased to announce that the two additional offshore patrol vessels that we committed to build in last year's Strategic Defence and Security Review will be named HMS Tamar and HMS Spey. The construction of the first, HMS Tamar, formally began today.

These names follow the River Class nomenclature of the Royal Navy's Offshore Patrol Vessel fleet and continue the tradition of recognising the service, history and battle honours of earlier ships of the name.

Since 1758, six ships have been named after the River Tamar in south-west England, and battle honours were won for Burma 1824-25 and Ashantee 1873-74. Most recently, HMS Tamar was the name of the Royal Navy's shore establishment in Hong Kong until 1997.

Since 1814, seven ships have been named after the River Spey in north-east Scotland, and battle honours were won for the Atlantic 1940-43, North Africa 1942-43 and Burma 1944-45. The most recent ship, a minesweeper, left service in 1998.

These new 2,000 tonne ships, together with the three already in build, will deliver a more modern and capable fleet, supporting our destroyers and frigates in delivering their tasking, as well as enhancing our contribution to maritime security and fisheries protection.

[HCWS338]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### December Agriculture Council

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 12 and 13 December in Brussels. I will represent the United Kingdom.

As the provisional agenda stands, the primary focus for fisheries will be reaching political agreements on 2017 fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of stocks in EU waters, certain non-EU waters and the Black sea.

On agriculture, draft conclusions will be adopted on strengthening farmers' position in the food supply chain and tackling unfair trading practices. There will be an exchange of views concerning agriculture and climate change, and a progress report on the proposed organics regulation.

There are currently two confirmed any other business items labelled for this Council:

Plant breeders' rights (tabled by the presidency)

Information on the application of new plant health regulation (tabled by the Commission).

[HCWS331]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Al-Qaeda: Alternative Name

**The Minister for Security (Mr Ben Wallace):** We have today laid an order under section 3(6) of the Terrorism Act 2000 which, with effect from tomorrow, will specify "Jabhat Fatah al-Sham" as an alias of the proscribed organisation known as Al Qaeda.

Jabhat Fatah al-Sham have previously operated under the name the Al Nusrah Front. Al Qaeda was proscribed in March 2001 and the Al Nusrah Front was recognised as an alias of the group by a name change order in July 2013.

We are clear that terrorist groups should not be able to claim a false legitimacy whilst continuing with their terrorist activities, by simply operating under an alternative name.

Despite the rebranding of the group, we continue to assess that Jabhat Fatah al-Sham is a violent terrorist organisation that retains strong links to AQ and promotes a global extremist ideology. We have no evidence to suggest that Jabhat Fatah al-Sham has changed its methods, aims or ideology.

The effect of this order is to put it beyond any doubt that being a member of or supporting any group operating under this name will be a criminal offence, contrary to sections 11 and 12 of the Terrorism Act.

[HCWS333]

### Asylum Accommodation

**The Minister for Immigration (Mr Robert Goodwill):** There has been considerable interest in the accommodation and support that is provided to asylum seekers. I am committed to ensuring that destitute asylum seekers are accommodated in safe, secure and suitable accommodation and that they are treated with dignity. I have listened

carefully to hon. Members and non-governmental organisations' concerns about the arrangements, including their observations and criticisms of the current contractual arrangements.

The current contractual arrangements expire in 2017, with an option to extend them for a further two years. I have considered carefully whether to extend these contracts and weighed up a range of factors, including the value for money they offer the taxpayer and the improvements that have been made to the standard of accommodation when compared to those achieved under previous arrangements. I have decided to extend the contracts until 2019. However, I recognise that there are improvements that can be made. Therefore I have taken this opportunity to make changes and additional investment to address the concerns that have been raised and improve the services that are provided. These changes will build upon the improvements that we have already made this year in response to the concerns of hon. Members and others.

First I have increased the amount of money that the Home Office pays for the provision of welfare officers and staff property management. This is in direct response to feedback that more attention is needed to ensure that asylum seekers receive the welfare support they need and are able to raise any concerns they have with the accommodation providers. It will also ensure that property standards continue to be closely managed and further improved; and that sufficient suitable property is available. The money will only be available for the employment of additional resources engaged directly on these customer-focused activities.

I have also agreed that the Department should work with providers on developing different contractual terms to ensure that there is sufficient initial accommodation available and thereby further reduce the need to use contingency arrangements, such as hotels, in the future. I am pleased to report that the use of contingency accommodation is already much reduced but these changes will add in resilience, further reduce the numbers and keep them down.

Finally I have introduced a new higher price band for any increases in the number of asylum seekers requiring accommodation, this will allow the providers to further increase their property portfolios if required and widen the areas in which they operate. This will reduce the need to continually increase the number of asylum seekers accommodated in certain communities. This follows work to increase the number of local authority areas that participate in the asylum dispersal scheme, which I am pleased to report has increased the number of participating areas by over one third in the past 18 months.

The Department will continue to monitor the providers closely to ensure that they comply with the requirements of the contract and work closely with non-government organisations and service users to respond to feedback and continue to improve the system.

My officials have started work on putting in place new arrangements for when these contracts expire in 2019. This work is at an early stage and we are engaging with a range of stakeholders to consider options for the future arrangements.

[HCWS335]

## Gangmasters Licensing Authority

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd):** The 2015-16 annual report and accounts for the Gangmasters Licensing Authority are today being laid before the House and will be published on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). Copies will also be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS334]

### HMIC: PEEL Legitimacy and Leadership Report

**The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Brandon Lewis):** Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary (HMIC) has today published its legitimacy and leadership reports as part of the 2016-17 PEEL inspection programme. Today's report by the inspectorate delivers, in general, a positive assessment of forces' ability to keep individuals safe and reduce crime while acting with legitimacy and in providing effective leadership.

The legitimacy report includes the response to a commission by the Prime Minister, then Home Secretary, to examine the issue of police officers developing inappropriate relationships with victims of domestic abuse and vulnerable individuals. And in this area, its findings are shocking.

As the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, I wish to reiterate that the vast majority of police officers and police staff, including PCSOs, conduct themselves, with the highest standards of integrity. The inspectorate highlights a number of positive stories of best practice that have developed within some police forces to address the issues related to abuse of authority and inappropriate relationships.

However, HMIC's findings indicate that more is needed from the policing profession as a whole to demonstrate to the public, and to the perpetrators, that there is no place in policing for those who abuse their authority for sexual gain. Where these instances do occur it undermines justice, lets down the majority of decent, hardworking individuals serving in policing, and causes serious damage to the public's confidence in the police.

While some progress has been made in tackling this issue, decisive action is needed to improve how forces detect and respond to this type of abuse where it occurs. Today I have written to both the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) and the College of Policing to set out the Government's expectations and commission the further work needed to address the shortcomings HMIC has identified.

#### *Code on professional boundaries and personal relationships*

First, a clear message is required for all who serve in policing about the need for professional boundaries to be maintained and the importance of police officers and police staff not using their professional position to pursue inappropriate relationships with current or former victims, witnesses or suspects. There must be zero tolerance for those who overstep these boundaries and this change in culture is needed across all ranks and all aspects of policing.

The College of Policing are now looking at the feasibility of developing a new supplementary addendum to the code of ethics. The addendum would establish clear

guidelines on professional boundaries and personal relationships to set out the expectations and requirements of all who serve in policing in maintaining appropriate relationships and responding to these issues where they occur. I have asked that the college further support this work by building this issue into training and other work on vulnerability.

*National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC) led work to produce a national strategy for dealing with corruption and abuse of authority for sexual gain*

Secondly, there is need for the sector to be more consistent in how it identifies and responds to this wrongdoing, with a need for improved capability in many forces to proactively detect and deter police officers and staff acting in this way.

Work is already under way within the NPCC to establish a national strategy for dealing with abuse of authority for sexual gain and associated corruption which should be ready by the end of March 2017. The chair of the NPCC, Chief Constable Sara Thornton, will now ensure this strategy addresses the capability concerns that HMIC has identified, including systems and device monitoring, risk profiling and intelligence gathering to identify individuals who have used police databases or devices to seek out vulnerable people to establish sexual contact.

#### *National consistency in recording and reporting*

HMIC's report indicates there is a shortcoming in how different forces define and report these offences leading to inconsistent understanding of the scale and handling of these matters.

Therefore as part of the national strategy, the NPCC will ensure this includes a consistent definition which clarifies how abuse of authority relates to corruption, and how policing should record and respond to these matters where they are identified.

#### *Mandatory referral to the Independent Police Complaints Commission*

Finally, we must ensure that the legislative framework is clear in setting out how these matters should be handled.

Abuse of authority for sexual gain constitutes serious corruption and should be referred to the Independent Police Complaints Commission for consideration. However, as HMIC's report makes clear, forces are not referring all such matters.

The Government therefore intend to bring forward changes to the Police (Complaints and Misconduct) Regulations 2012 to put beyond doubt that these matters must be referred automatically to the IPCC.

I am confident that these concrete measures will build on the recent steps taken by police forces across England and Wales to address these issues. There must be no doubt that further action and stronger leadership across all ranks is needed to prevent, identify and respond to the harm caused by those who abuse their position of authority.

The message must be unequivocal that those who do abuse their power for sexual gain have no place in policing.

[HCWS336]



# Petitions

Thursday 8 December 2016

## PRESENTED PETITION

*Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor*

### Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

*The petition of residents of North East Fife,*

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Stephen Gethins.]

[P001991]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### OBSERVATIONS

#### Implementation of the 1995 and 2011 Pension Acts

*The petition of residents of Worsley and Eccles South,*

Declares that as a result of the way in which the 1995 Pension Act and the 2011 Pension Act were implemented, women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age; further that hundreds of thousands of women have had significant changes imposed on them with little or no personal notice; further that implementation took place faster than promised; further that this gave no time to make alternative pension plans; and further that retirement plans have been shattered with devastating consequences.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to make fair transitional arrangements for all women born in the 1950s (on or after 6 April 1951) who have unfairly borne the burden of the increase to the State Pension Age.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Barbara Keeley, *Official Report*, 11 October 2016; Vol. 615, c. 262.]

[P001709]

The following petitions in the same terms were also presented: [P001762], [P001748], [P001766], [P001954], [P001745], [P001817], [P001763], [P001736], [P001933], [P001934], [P001935], [P001936], [P001850], [P001768], [P001776], [P001957], [P001939], [P001930], [P001719], [P001943], [P001709], [P001775], [P001777], [P001778],

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*Observations from the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions:*

The pension system, along with the whole welfare system, needs to change to reflect the reality of today. In recent decades we are living longer, and we are able to work for longer as we become healthier.

The equalisation and acceleration of State Pension age for both men and women was necessary to ensure the system's sustainability in light of increasing life expectancy and increasing pressure on public resources, and the package now in place is balanced and affordable.

The changes to the State Pension age began with the gradual equalisation of State Pension age at 65 for both men and women, which was first set out in the Pensions Act 1995. This was necessary to meet the UK's obligations under EU law to eliminate gender inequalities in social security provision.

The increase in the State Pension age to 66 was set out in the Pensions Act 2007 and due to increasing life expectancy the Pensions Act 2011 accelerated this process

to allow for a rise to 66 by 2020 for both genders and provided for the equalisation of the State Pension age to 65 by November 2018.

During the 2011 Pensions Act the Government made a concession which slowed down the increase of the state pension age for women so no one would face an increase of more than 18 months compared to the increase as part of the Pensions Act 1995. Transitional arrangements at a cost of £1.1 billion were made in order to lessen the impact of these changes for those worst affected, and for 81% of these women the increase will be no more than 12 months. This concession benefited almost a quarter of a million women who would otherwise have experienced delays of up to two years.

Reversing the 1995 Act would be unaffordable—costing a minimum estimate of £77 billion. Without equalisation, and in 2010, women would spend on average 41% of their lives in retirement with a State Pension age of 60.

These changes were fully debated and voted on in 2011 when legislation was before Parliament, and all those affected by increases in State Pension age by the 2011 Act were written to in the period between January 2012 and November 2013.

The Department for Work and Pensions provided a range of additional information in order for all individuals to find out their State Pension age and the conditions of their benefits. Since April 2000, the Department has provided more than 14 million personalised State Pension estimates to people who requested them either online, via telephone or post, and encourages people to request these State Pension estimates as part of on-going communications.

In addition, employment maximises people's opportunities to build up savings, helps to maintain social networks, and is beneficial to health provided the employment takes into account the person's broader circumstances. For most people work is beneficial not only because it provides an income, but also because it also gives individuals greater control over their own lives, and independent analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies has shown that the rise in women's State Pension age since 2010 has been accompanied by increases in employment rates for the women affected.

For those who struggle to find employment and where people need it, there is a safety net in place through the welfare system.

Supporting individuals aged 50 years and over to remain in the labour market and tackling the barriers to them doing so is a key priority for this Government. By the mid-2030s the number of individuals aged 50 and over will represent over half of the UK adult population and employers increasingly need to employ and retain the skills and experience of older workers. To support these individuals the Default Retirement Age was abolished, so individuals can retire when it is right for them, and the right to request flexible working was extended.

This Government are deeply committed to ensuring that employers are aware of the wealth of skills and experience that older workers bring to the workplace, and on 4 October the Government announced the appointment of the Business in the Community Age at

Work leadership team led by Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK and Ireland Life, as Business Champion for Older Workers. Mr Briggs and this team of employers will spearhead the Government's work to support employers to retain, retrain, and recruit older workers.

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches have the flexibility to offer all claimants, including older people, a comprehensive menu of help which includes skills provision and job search support. Work Coaches undertake extensive training before taking up the post, and build up a wide range of skills and in-depth labour market knowledge, and additional training modules are available for Work Coaches when they deal with older claimants to support them more effectively and in understanding the challenges older claimants face.

Older Claimant Champions were introduced, in April 2015, in the seven Jobcentre Plus Regional Groups to tackle the barriers faced by older claimants in getting back to work. Older Claimant Champions work with Jobcentre Work Coaches—and other staff—to emphasise the importance of supporting older claimants, share best practice and challenge out of date perceptions to support this group of people.

Where there are health conditions or disabilities, the Department has published the Work, Health and Disability Green Paper which looks at ways of better joining up the health, welfare and employment systems to support those seeking work as well as those in work.

A Carers in Employment pilot has been established across nine Local Authorities to explore how businesses can give employees with caring responsibilities more help, for example promoting flexible working patterns and setting up carers surgeries to help carers manage their caring responsibilities alongside their paid work.

In addition to increasing employment prospects for women above the age of 60, this Government have introduced the New State Pension. The system in place for people who reached their State Pension age before 6 April 2016 was extremely complex and the new State Pension brings greater clarity by helping people to understand their State Pension more easily. It is also much more generous for many women who have been historically worse off under the old system. On average, women reaching State Pension age last year get a higher state pension over their lifetimes than women who reached State Pension age at any point before them, even when the acceleration of State Pension age is taken into account. And, by 2030, over 3 million women stand to gain an average of £550 extra per year as a result of these changes.

The New State Pension works hand in hand with Automatic Enrolment, enabling many more people to save in a workplace pension. And, combined with reviews of the State Pension age, these measures are designed to form the main elements of a sustainable basis of retirement income in the decades to come.

The Government have already made transitional arrangements for those most affected by changes to their State Pension age and introducing further concessions cannot be justified given the imperative to focus public resources on helping those most in need.

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