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**HOUSE OF COMMONS**  
**OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY**  
**DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 9 January 2017**

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# HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

## MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JULY 2016)

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Alok Sharma, MP

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Robert Goodwill, MP (Minister for Immigration)  
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Lord Price CVO

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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—Michael Ellis, MP §

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Robert Syms, MP  
Andrew Griffiths, MP**ASSISTANT WHIPS—**Michael Ellis, MP §  
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Graham Stuart, MP  
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Mark Spencer, MP  
Christopher Pincher, MP  
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Penny Mordaunt, MP (Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work)

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Caroline Nokes, MP (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery)

Lord Henley §

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DEPUTY LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt Hon. Earl Howe §

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§ *Members of the Government listed under more than one Department*


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Gosia McBride

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 BILLS SUPPORT OFFICER—Mark Oxborough

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 PROCEDURE: CLERKS—Martyn Atkins, Leoni Kurt  
 STANDARDS: CLERKS—Lynn Gardner, Jenny Burch

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SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION: SECRETARIES—Lynn Gardner, Ben Williams

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BACKBENCH BUSINESS: CLERKS—Mike Hennessy, Sharon Maddix

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PROCEDURAL PUBLISHING OPERATIONS MANAGER—Stuart Miller

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# THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE  
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND  
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2015]

SIXTY-FIFTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF  
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 619

NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2016-2017

### House of Commons

*Monday 9 January 2017*

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

#### PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

### Oral Answers to Questions

#### WORK AND PENSIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Gerald Jones. Where is the feller? He is not here.

#### Self-employment

2. **Peter Dowd** (Bootle) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of self-employment.  
[908056]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** The Government support those who aspire to be their own boss. The number of self-employed people in the UK labour market has increased by nearly 800,000 since 2010 and by 129,000 in the last year alone. We continue to monitor and review the impact of self-employment on the wider labour market and benefits system.

**Peter Dowd:** A Citizens Advice report in August 2015 said that there were as many as 460,000 people in bogus self-employment, with a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds in lost revenue. Is it not about time that the Secretary of State, rather than hounding disabled people,

started tackling exploitative companies, many of which have lucrative public sector contracts, that are forcing people down the self-employment route?

**Damian Green:** The hon. Gentleman is right that there should be no exploitation of workers, particularly through forced self-employment, but he will have noticed that the Government are on the case, having set up the Matthew Taylor review specifically to explore alternative employment structures and to consider how employment rules need to be altered to keep pace with changes in how people work in the modern economy. If, however, he is characterising the growth of self-employment as harmful to the jobs market, I would disagree. The new enterprise allowance is proving very successful at making sure that people who want to can work for themselves. I am sure that he, like me, welcomes the fact that in his own constituency self-employment is up by 7% since 2015, and that the claimant count in the last year has fallen by 12%.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that rather than denigrating people who become self-employed, we ought to be celebrating the fact that they are prepared to take a risk that many others are not? Will he make it as easy as possible for them to take on new employees and become employers themselves?

**Damian Green:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. I have already mentioned the new enterprise allowance, which is designed specifically to help people to stop claiming benefits, set up their own businesses, and then carry on and employ others in a way that I hope everyone on both sides of the House would welcome. This scheme is proving extremely successful. A survey published last year showed that 80% of businesses that started with the new enterprise allowance were still trading, which makes it more than twice as effective as the old jobseeker's allowance in terms of keeping people off benefits, so it is doing good work.

**Dame Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster Central) (Lab): Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

Will the Secretary of State ensure that there is much closer co-operation between the single fraud investigation service and local authorities on the prosecution of abuse, including on self-employment status, so that councils can be confident that when they report possible scams, including by employers, they are properly followed up?

**Damian Green:** I am happy to pass on the right hon. Lady's message to the relevant bodies—councils and the fraud investigation service. Of course, while self-employment is a good thing, fraud involving any kind of employment is wrong, so clearly we must get ever more effective at combatting it.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I am sure that the Secretary of State agrees that online opportunities are giving many people the chance to set up a microbusiness. Does he agree that schemes such as the pop-up shop initiative that Torbay Council ran to help internet micro-retailers to take their first step on to the high street are the kind of thing we should be looking at in terms of self-employment, rather than some of the negative impressions we hear from the Opposition?

**Damian Green:** I very much agree, and I particularly welcome Torbay's pop-up shop experiment. I had such a scheme in my constituency a couple of years ago, and it did indeed prove successful in allowing microbusinesses to start and to develop into larger businesses, thereby creating more employment and wealth, so I am delighted to hear what is happening in Torbay.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Happy new year, Mr Speaker.

Many self-employed people do not earn a great deal of money and will be losing out from cuts to tax credits and the introduction of universal credit. Should not the Government be supporting those who become self-employed?

**Damian Green:** I am sorry, Mr Speaker, that I have not yet wished you happy new year publicly—I have done so only privately—as clearly that is becoming a compulsory part of this question session. I now wish you happy new year publicly.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of self-employed earners and universal credit. Universal credit reduces poverty by making work pay. It supports claimants to enter work, and then to be able to keep some of their benefits while they are at work if they are not receiving or earning very much money. Universal credit actually does the opposite of what the hon. Gentleman says—it helps people who are getting into work for the first time.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): But is not the biggest trend in self-employment the massive increase in women who are self-employed, with 70% of those newly self-employed in 2014 being women? Yet self-employment is the area where the wage gap is biggest. According to the OECD, self-employed men earn an average of £17,000 a year, but average earnings for self-employed women stand at £9,800. We know from the Department's figures

that women are less likely to access loans and so forth for self-employment. What is the Secretary of State doing to deal with gender inequality in self-employment?

**Damian Green:** I agree with right hon. Lady that gender inequality and pay generally are issues that we need to do more about, and self-employment is one part of that. That is why we have introduced measures such as the new enterprise allowance—

**Fiona Mactaggart:** Only men take it up.

**Damian Green:** The right hon. Lady says that only men take it up, but that is patently not true.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** It is disproportionately men.

**Damian Green:** If the right hon. Lady is saying that it is disproportionately men who take the allowance up, I would urge more potential women entrepreneurs to take it up. We are improving the new enterprise allowance later this year to make sure that the mentoring and advice goes on for longer so that more people—men and women—will be able to benefit from the freedom of being able to start, set up and run their own business, which millions of people want to do.

**Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): A happy new year to you, Mr Speaker, and to everyone.

Resolution Foundation data show that self-employment accounts for 81% of the net change in employment since 2008. The Government's plans to abolish class 2 national insurance contributions could leave low-income, self-employed women paying five times as much to access maternity allowance. Given that nearly 2 million self-employed workers earn less than the national living wage, why have the Government decided to make social security support harder to access for so many of Britain's entrepreneurs?

**Damian Green:** They have not. Let me update the hon. Lady's figures, which I know she has quoted before. Since 2010, 29% of the increase has been in self-employment, and in the last 12 months—

**Debbie Abrahams:** Since 2008.

**Damian Green:** I know about 2008; I am giving more up-to-date figures, as I said.

Over the past year, 38% of the increase in employment has been in self-employment, so the figures are not as the hon. Lady suggests. As I said in answer to the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), the whole point of universal credit is that people, whether it be through self-employment or employment, are able to keep their income. We have reduced the taper so that less of their income is lost when they go up the earnings scale and get into work. I am afraid that the hon. Lady simply misunderstands what is happening in the welfare system.

### Disabled and Terminally Ill Children

3. **Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): What welfare support the Government are providing for disabled and terminally ill children. [908057]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** This year we are due to spend nearly £1.9 billion on supporting ill and disabled children through disability living allowance. We have special rules in place to grant immediate access to the benefit for those who are terminally ill.

**Amanda Milling:** May I also wish you a happy new year, Mr Speaker?

I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. The DWP family resources survey that was published last year showed that there were nearly 1 million disabled children—a 20% increase over the past 10 years. Will she outline what measures the Government are implementing to take account of that increase so that these children can access the support and the specialist equipment that they require?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Local authorities and clinical commissioning groups have a requirement to meet the needs of children with a special educational need or disability, including by providing specialist equipment. In the past few months, my Department has set up a children and young person's forum so that we can better understand the unmet need that is out there. My hon. Friend will know from the work that I have done with one of the organisations with which she is involved that we are looking to support charities, social enterprises and businesses that are providing these much-needed services.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** Many of us who liked some of the elements of the big society when we first heard about it now quite like some of the utterances about the shared society. However, if the programme is to work for children, and not just for those who are terminally ill but people with disabilities—some disabilities are abilities; I am thinking here of autism—it must have teeth, leadership and resources.

**Penny Mordaunt:** Absolutely. The measures announced by the Prime Minister today will be accompanied by additional funding, and every age range in society will be taken into account. There will, for instance, be measures to help children and young people—I have just described what my Department is doing to ensure that their needs are considered—as well as new provision for those in the workplace.

**Rob Marris (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab):** Some children with disabilities receive disabled students allowances. Given that a number of them are not eligible for personal independence payments or disability living allowance, why are the Government cutting DSA?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We are very conscious of the needs of children and young people in particular, which is why we have set up an additional forum. Obviously we are concerned about people in the workplace, but if we get this right for children and young people, including students, we will avoid problems for future ministerial teams. I shall be happy to look into any particular case that the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise.

## Health Outcomes: Work

**4. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health on ensuring that GPs and other healthcare professionals take account of the value of work as a successful health outcome; and if he will make a statement. [908058]

**20. James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con):** What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health on ensuring that GPs and other healthcare professionals take account of the value of work as a successful health outcome; and if he will make a statement. [908075]

**Michael Fabricant:** Can you issue a papal bull, Mr Speaker, stating that we do not have to say happy new year—but happy new year anyway?

**Mr Speaker:** That is very welcome. We do not need to take up unnecessary time, but I appreciate the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's suggestion.

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** I shall not say happy new year again, Mr Speaker.

Evidence shows that being in the right work is good for health, and that being out of work can have a detrimental effect on health. That was why I launched the "Work, health and disability" Green Paper jointly with the Secretary of State for Health. The Green Paper expresses our intention of working with healthcare professionals to help people into employment, and our current consultations ask how we can best achieve that goal.

**Michael Fabricant:** Helen Stokes-Lampard, the chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, has rightly spoken about the burden of work on GPs. Notwithstanding that, what analysis has my right hon. Friend carried out of the effectiveness of fit notes in getting people back to work?

**Damian Green:** I am keen to improve their effectiveness in that regard, and I also take my hon. Friend's point about the pressure on GPs. In the consultation document we consider the possibility of extending the issuing of fit notes to other healthcare professionals, and I shall be interested to see what response we receive, not just from those who receive the fit notes but from the professionals involved.

**James Cartlidge:** I strongly support my right hon. Friend in respect of this specific policy. Does he agree, however, that as the consultants—as it were—to whom patients are referred will be work coaches, it is critical that those people receive training that will enable them to deal with the hardest cases among those who are unemployed, particularly those with pressing mental health problems?

**Damian Green:** I agree with my hon. Friend and am grateful for his support. I am happy to reassure him that all work coaches will complete specific training for their role, including a course that combines the knowledge, skills and behaviour that they will need to deal with the people with whom they work, particularly those with

mental health conditions. Obviously, work coaches will need specific skills to handle the many issues that will arise from such conditions.

22. [908077] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): The benefits of an autistic constituent of mine were taken away by a DWP caseworker after my constituent told that person that he enjoyed his hobby of being a disc jockey. He received a bill showing a fictional figure, invented by the DWP, representing the amount of income that the Department needed to recover. A work coach should be assisting individuals, not penalising them, so will the Secretary of State please do better?

**Damian Green:** Obviously I do not know the details of the individual case, but if the hon. Gentleman writes to me or the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, we will look at it. I can assure him, however, that in the vast majority of cases, work coaches do their best and work very hard to help people to make the most of their lives, and to get into employment. That is at the heart of what we do.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): After the big cut in employment and support allowance takes place in April and the new Work and Health programme is established, will the Department be spending more or less on employment support for ESA claimants than is currently the case under the Work programme and Work Choice?

**Damian Green:** I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that as part of the changes there is an extra £330 million support programme for those in that group. We will target support more effectively to ensure that as many of them as possible can get back into work.

#### Ex-offenders

5. **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): What steps he is taking to help ex-offenders into work. [908059]

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** There is a huge premium on helping ex-offenders into work for them, their families and their children's life chances, and for reducing costs to society. Jobcentre Plus now has a dedicated resource of 150 prison work coaches who are helping to support prisoners nationwide.

**Robert Neill:** I am grateful to the Minister for his response. He will know from his own experience, and from the excellent report on supporting offenders by the Work and Pensions Committee, which my own Select Committee would endorse, that getting a job is one of the best means of preventing reoffending. As well as the work that is being done, will he consider what can be done jointly with the Ministry of Justice to ensure there is better collaboration between job centres and community rehabilitation companies so that they are joined up, given that people currently risk the cliff edge to which the report refers?

**Damian Hinds:** We work closely with the Ministry of Justice on numerous joint initiatives locally and nationally, and we are supporting the development of the MOJ's new offender employment strategy, but I recognise that we need to improve opportunities for ex-offenders, so I

welcome the continued attention of my hon. Friend and his Committee, as well as the Work and Pensions Committee report, to which we will respond in due course.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): Her Majesty's inspectorates of prisons and probation found that not a single prisoner had been helped into employment by the Through the Gate provision, which is the Government's flagship programme for achieving a step change in rehabilitation. Did that surprise the Minister, and what is his response?

**Damian Hinds:** First of all, my response is that this has been a challenge for successive Governments for many years. We do need to do better, but there is good work going on. Ultimately, to improve the situation, we need more prisoners to be work-ready, and we need more employers to be willing to take the plunge and take on a prisoner. Having governors controlling skills provision in prisons will have a beneficial effect on work-readiness, but we all need to encourage more employers to step forward. Initiatives such as the See Potential programme can play an important part in that, as can Ban the Box and the Employers' Forum for Reducing Re-offending, but of course we need to do more.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The Minister will be aware that people on the autistic spectrum are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system and that people with autism have great difficulty in finding jobs. Can he reassure me that when he looks at the consultation on the health and disability Green Paper, he will look specifically at people with autism and ex-offenders with autism, as only 16% of people with autism are currently in employment?

**Damian Hinds:** My right hon. Friend highlights an important point. I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work will be looking very closely at the issue of people with autism. This also highlights that one of the key determinants for post-release employment is what happened with the individual before they were convicted, and it highlights again the importance of making sure nobody is left behind. In our work, we pay particular attention to all these groups who face particularly difficult barriers in getting into work.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): Our Work and Pensions Committee report found that reoffending costs £15 billion to the public purse, yet fewer than one in four ex-offenders goes on to find work. Alarming, Westminster Council's report on rough sleeping that was published before Christmas found that one in three of its rough sleepers had come directly from prison. Why is the Department unable to provide proper transitional support for people leaving prison to make sure that they are not on the streets and that they are assisted into employment?

**Damian Hinds:** It is vital that ex-offenders and people on release from prison have help with finances, employment and housing. Among the things we have done to help on housing is to ensure that there are no waiting days in relation to universal credit and to keep the housing element in universal credit open for 26 weeks rather than 13 for certain types of prisoner in order to ensure that we can enhance their support.

### Pension Investments

6. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that people have the information they need to make informed decisions about how they use their pension investments. [908060]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions (Richard Harrington):** Mr Speaker, were I allowed to wish you a happy new year, you can be assured that I would do so.

Pension Wise provides guidance to people aged 50 and over with a defined contribution pension pot on their options under the pension flexibilities. We are consulting on a single financial guidance body to provide debt advice and guidance on money and pensions.

**Henry Smith:** In thanking the Minister for his reply, I cannot resist wishing him, and indeed the whole House, a happy new year. Can he tell me what information the Government are providing to let people know about their entitlement to the state pension?

**Richard Harrington:** I thank my hon. Friend for his salutations and for his question. The Department for Work and Pensions continues to run a multi-channel communication campaign that includes radio, press and social media to raise awareness of the new state pension. As well as directing people to information on gov.uk and working with stakeholders to deliver key information, our priority has been to provide personalised information to individuals so that they know how much state pension they are likely to get, and from when. Since February 2016, the online Check your State Pension service has had more than 2.1 million views.

**Alison McGovern** (Wirral South) (Lab): The Minister's warm words will do nothing to reassure the women in my constituency for whom the Government's advice on pensions has a terrible reputation because of the injustices highlighted by the Women Against State Pension Inequality campaign. The one thing the Government could do to persuade the public to believe their pronouncements on pension entitlements would be to give justice to the WASPI women by looking again at the 2011 changes.

**Richard Harrington:** The hon. Lady will be aware, because the WASPI women have been discussed in the House and I have discussed this matter personally with her on many occasions, that the changes affecting them were in the Pensions Act 1995, and that a lot of time and resources were devoted to informing them of the situation, including millions of letters being sent out from 2011.

**Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): A happy new year to you and everyone in the House, Mr Speaker, and particularly to the WASPI women. I hope that they have a better year this year.

The leaflet entitled "Ways to save in 2017" recently published by the Treasury mentioned the junior ISA, the help to buy ISA, premium bonds, cash and stocks and shares ISAs and the new lifetime ISA, but it completely omitted to mention pensions. That is an absolute disgrace, and it confirms my fears that the Government have

downgraded the role of pensions and are using the gimmick of ISAs to distract attention from pensionable savings. Does the Minister agree that pensionable saving is the best form of saving for retirement? Will he establish a pensions and savings commission to ensure that dignity in retirement is promoted and protected?

**Richard Harrington:** I must totally disagree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis of the importance that the Government place on pensions. A lot of effort goes into communicating with people, on television and elsewhere, about auto-enrolment. The auto-enrolment of so many people has been one of the great successes of this Government and of the coalition, and I hope that that continues.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): I know that the Minister agrees with me on the need for greater transparency in the pensions world, particularly around costs. He will therefore be keen to address the widespread criticism of the Government's failing to act to ensure that people get the best possible returns. The Financial Conduct Authority's interim report in November highlighted a number of failures in the asset management industry relating to the transparency of costs and charges applied to pension investments, stating that "weak price competition" was having a "material impact" on investment returns. Labour is committed to implementing all the FCA's recommendations. Are the Government?

**Richard Harrington:** Yes.

### Children in Relative Poverty

7. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): What recent estimate his Department has made of the number of children living in relative poverty in the UK. [908061]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** There are 100,000 fewer children in relative poverty than in 2010 and 557,000 fewer children living in workless households. The forthcoming Green Paper on social justice will identify and address the root causes of poverty, building on the two statutory indicators set out in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016—namely, worklessness and educational attainment.

**Stella Creasy:** I note that the Minister uses the figures for relative poverty, and I am a little surprised. We know that absolute poverty in this country has been in decline for the past 10 years, except among children. We know that 500,000 more children in this country are living in absolute poverty than was the case in 2010. What responsibility does he think this Government and the previous Government have for that?

**Damian Green:** The Government have a responsibility to make sure that as many households as possible have work, particularly households with children. Working-age adults in non-working families are almost four times more likely to be living on a low income. The "Child Poverty Transitions" report of June 2015 found that 74% of poor children in workless families who moved into full employment exited poverty. That is what we can do, and are doing, for children who have been in poverty.

The hon. Lady neglected to say it, but there are now 500,000 fewer people living in absolute poverty than in 2010. The key point is about getting people into work. As a reasonable Opposition Member, I hope she would acknowledge that achieving historically low levels of unemployment is actually the best thing we can do for children—it is the best way to get children and the households they live in out of poverty. I am happy to tell her that, in her constituency, the claimant count is down by 47% since 2010 and the youth claimant count has fallen by 2% in the past year.

**Mr Speaker:** All of us in the Chamber can learn about the merits of brevity from the right hon. Member for New Forest West, who will not disappoint me.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): However the problem presents in my surgeries, scratch the surface and, nine times out of 10, the swiftest cause of poverty is family breakdown, which will be a much harder nut to crack.

**Damian Green:** Absolutely. That is precisely why this Government, and previously the coalition Government, have decided that having a simple income-based measure and target is not the right way. We need to look at the root causes of child poverty, and having a range of indicators and targets—one of which is on family breakdown—is the best way to make sure that we have as few children as possible living in poverty and that more and more children are able to emerge from it.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): A good new year to you, Mr Speaker.

The Secretary of State has focused so far on the value of work in tackling child poverty, but the reality is that the average working family in receipt of universal credit will be more than £1,000 a year worse off by 2020. According to the Resolution Foundation, some working parents will be more than £2,500 a year worse off. With child poverty projected to rise dramatically over the next three years, why do the Government continue to downplay the role of income poverty in determining children's future health, job prospects and even life expectancy, in spite of all the evidence?

**Damian Green:** I am not downplaying the role. I am talking about the underlying causes and about making sure that we take a range of measures across the board that help to eradicate child poverty. That is the only sensible way to do it. Simply focusing on individual incomes or, indeed, individual benefits does not represent the whole realistic picture. We need to be much more wide-ranging in our approach.

**Dr Whiteford:** The Prime Minister has been talking over the weekend about the pressures faced by people who are just getting by on low and average incomes and about our shared responsibilities to them. Those are fine sentiments, but does the Secretary of State not accept that they sound utterly hollow when the Government's planned cuts to work allowances will slash the incomes of exactly those families who are just getting by? Does he accept that the Government have a responsibility to support parents who are working hard in average and low-paid jobs, rather than cutting their already stretched, precarious incomes?

**Damian Green:** No. Indeed, I would point out to the hon. Lady that this Government's introduction of the national living wage last year gave the lowest earners their biggest pay rise in 20 years—an increase of 6%. That is an example of a Government measure introduced by employers. I cannot think of a better early example of the shared society.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): What assessment have the Government made of how many more children will be pushed into poverty given the cuts to the work allowance under universal credit?

**Damian Green:** As I have said to a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House, the solution lies in a wider range of issues, and that is what we are introducing. We have the social justice Green Paper, about which I am sure we will have many discussions in this House and elsewhere. The root is making sure that as many people as possible can earn a salary and work. I am sure that the hon. Lady, like me, will welcome the fact that unemployment has come down by 53% in her constituency since 2010. That means thousands of families who are able to work and control their own lives, possibly working their way out of poverty. She ought to welcome that.

**Margaret Greenwood:** It is a poor Government who fail to understand the value of the nation's children. In addition to the universal credit work allowance cuts, this Government have abolished the child poverty unit and frozen social security payments, and are removing tax credits from third and subsequent children. Does the Minister think child poverty will go up or down as a result of those measures?

**Damian Green:** I have already given the hon. Lady a number of figures relating both to adult poverty and child poverty—

**Alex Cunningham** Up or down?

**Damian Green:** Well, the fact is that since 2010 there are 100,000 fewer children in relative poverty. I would hope that the hon. Lady would welcome that and the fact that the child poverty unit is now covering a much wider range of policies and is based inside the Department for Work and Pensions.

### Self-employment

8. **Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support self-employed people. [908062]

14. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support self-employed people. [908069]

21. **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support self-employed people. [908076]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** This Government are committed to supporting new enterprises. We are building on the success of the new enterprise allowance, which has already supported

96,000 claimants to start a new business. From this year, eligibility for NEA support will be extended to include universal credit claimants who are already self-employed.

**Sir David Amess:** Will my right hon. Friend look again at the regulations requiring small businesses and the self-employed to use online systems for their tax affairs? Does he recognise that these people often do not have the equipment, knowledge or broadband capacity to download the complex forms, and that the process often costs time and money?

**Damian Green:** I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that tax affairs are not my direct responsibility, but the Treasury will have heard what he had to say. What I can say is that Jobcentre Plus is always keen to help small businesses with individual problems they may have, such as with the use of online forms, and I hope that businesses in his constituency would find the jobcentre a helpful place to consult.

**Scott Mann:** In Cornwall, unemployment has continued to fall year on year to record low levels, and the county now has 61,000 self-employed people. Does my right hon. Friend agree that only under a Conservative Government can we continue to increase employment in Cornwall and further improve the creation of small businesses in those communities?

**Damian Green:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I know that in his constituency self-employment has increased by 7.6% since 2010. As I said in answer to previous questions, the UK labour market is in its strongest position for years. Clearly, the best way to promote new growth in jobs is to promote growth in small businesses, and I am delighted to hear it is going so well in Cornwall.

**David Morris:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that universal credit can help the self-employed, along with the other forms of benefit the Government are putting forward for them, because it can help people who are working as well as trying to set up on their own?

**Damian Green:** One difference between universal credit and the previous benefits it is replacing is that people can and do continue to receive it when they are still in work. It is particularly good at coping with people who may have fluctuating earnings, as many self-employed people do, because it can be flexible enough to adjust to that. The introduction of universal credit is another brick of the edifice of helping people to set up their own businesses.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** What is the Secretary of State going to do about people who are classified as self-employed because of their contract of employment? They are classified as such not because they have set up their own small business, but because their employer requires them to sign a contract saying that they are self-employed, which means that they get no sick pay and no annual leave. How is he going to help them?

**Damian Green:** I agree that that is an issue, which is precisely why we have set up the Matthew Taylor review. It is investigating precisely the new types of employment

structures that have been set up in recent years and making sure that employment laws keep up with new types of employment.

### National Living Wage

9. **Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the increase in the national living wage announced in the autumn statement 2016 on levels of employment in the north of England. [908063]

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** The number of people in employment in the north of England has increased by 112,000 over the past year. The national living wage has already given 1 million people a pay rise, helping to build an economy that works for all.

**Andrew Rosindell:** I thank the Minister for his reply, but has he considered the implications of the national living wage coming in so quickly for small and medium-sized businesses, particularly those in the manufacturing sector? What would he say to those businesses that will not be able to adjust in time, or that simply will not be profitable because the national living wage is being introduced so quickly?

**Damian Hinds:** Everybody should benefit from a strong economy, but as well as introducing the national living wage the Government have announced plans to reduce corporation tax further to 17% and to increase the employment allowance, which could be worth up to £3,000 a year.

**Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab):** Is it not perverse of the Government to have reduced work allowances and universal credit at the same time as we have seen increases in the national living wage, meaning that the overall benefit to individuals in work is actually reduced?

**Damian Hinds:** The Government have done a range of things. Universal credit is completely different from the legacy benefits it replaced, so it does not make sense to make a direct comparison with tax credits. We have to see it in the context of greater help with childcare and the introduction of the national living wage. Of course, the increased income tax personal allowance also means that people get to keep more of what they earn.

**Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con):** When my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr Osborne) introduced the national living wage, the Office for Budget Responsibility said that it would cost 60,000 jobs. Does the Minister think that that is a price worth paying, or is that another forecast from expert economists that we should ignore?

**Damian Hinds:** My hon. Friend is entirely correct about the OBR's projection at that time, but he will have noticed that that came in the context of considerably larger projected employment growth.

### Mental Health

10. **Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure that people with mental health conditions are supported into work. [908064]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** We are investing significant resources, including increasing coverage of Talking Therapy services by 600,000 people a year by 2020. Mental health is a key feature of our Green Paper “Improving Lives”, on which we are currently consulting. I thank Members on both sides of the House who came to our drop-in event on the Green Paper and who are helping with the consultation.

**Huw Merriman:** I welcome the Minister’s response and the Prime Minister’s intervention today on mental health. Does the Minister agree that in order better to support those with mental health conditions into the workplace, we need to transform the way we deliver mental health services for young people before they reach working age?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I agree with my hon. Friend absolutely. When I ask healthcare professionals who work in Department for Work and Pensions services what the single most significant transformative healthcare intervention would be, they say mental health support services for young people. The Prime Minister’s announcement on that was very welcome.

**Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op):** The “Five Year Forward View for Mental Health”, which was published a year ago, contained two specific recommendations for the Department for Work and Pensions, one of which was on employment support. Will the Minister update the House on the progress on that specific recommendation?

**Penny Mordaunt:** There were two targets, but the Department has set out a range of initiatives. Good progress has been made on all fronts, including the development of specific mental health support for the services we run, such as Access to Work. Considerable work has been going on, as the Prime Minister referred to earlier today, but she also said that we need to pick up the pace on this issue, and I agree with her absolutely.

**Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP):** The proposed closure of eight Glasgow job centres will result in increased travel times and introduce further barriers for people with mental health conditions who are seeking help to get into work. How will the Minister ensure that people with mental health conditions continue to receive the help that they need?

**Penny Mordaunt:** My hon. Friend the Minister for Employment has met all the MPs who are concerned about those locations across Glasgow, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Welfare Reform has met Scottish Ministers to discuss the issue. We are aware of the concerns that Members have raised. If the hon. Lady has any subsequent comments to make, she is more than welcome to have meetings with either me or my colleagues.

**Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):** People with mental health conditions are more likely to fail the work capability assessment and more likely to be sanctioned. At the same time, we know from independent research how damaging work capability assessments and sanctions are for people’s mental health.

The Prime Minister made her announcements today, but when will the Government take responsibility for the impact of their policies on mental health and ensure that timely, evidence-based support from trained mental health professionals is available for claimants with mental health conditions? Will the Secretary of State commit to scrapping the work capability assessment and punitive sanctions, as Labour has?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I refer the hon. Lady to three things: the Secretary of State’s reform speech in which he announced that his focus was on the particular issue of sanctions for people with mental health conditions; obviously, the Prime Minister’s statement today; and the Green Paper, a major tenet of which is that we are consulting on the work capability assessment—a Labour policy that is not delivering. I am very pleased that enormous numbers of Labour MPs came to our drop-in on this and will be helping us with the consultation. This is an important issue, and we should get it right.

### Contracted-out Health Assessments

11. **Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op):** What recent assessment he has made of the (a) accuracy and (b) efficiency of contracted-out health assessments for employment and support allowance and personal independence payments. [908065]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** Over 93.5% of assessments for personal independence payment and over 90% of work capability assessments for ESA are deemed of acceptable quality through independent audit. Those that are not deemed acceptable are returned to the provider to be reworked. The Department closely monitors all elements of providers’ performance and holds those providers to account through their contracts.

**Christina Rees:** Will the Minister consider introducing and funding the mandatory use of body-worn cameras by all contracted-out assessment providers, which will improve the accuracy and efficiency of the much-disputed health assessment reports and safeguard claimants and assessors, and which is proving to be very successful when used by emergency services across the UK?

**Penny Mordaunt:** There are detailed improvement plans for both PIP and ESA. Another thing that is being considered is how assessments are recorded. If the hon. Lady wants to write to me with any specific suggestions, I will be very happy to look at them.

**Justin Tomlinson (North Swindon) (Con):** The vast majority of successful appeals are due to additional late submitted evidence. What more can be done to access and share medical evidence between health professionals and assessors ahead of the appeals decision?

**Penny Mordaunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will know that the Department has carried out a number of pilots to look at being more lenient at the early stages of assessment to give people time to get that health care information in front of assessors. That move is paying dividends, and we hope that it will be rolled out.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On this question, I would call on the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Corri Wilson) if she were standing, but as she is not, I cannot.

**Corri Wilson** (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** As she is standing now, I will call her.

23. [908078] **Corri Wilson:** I am afraid that many of my constituents have been refused home assessments for personal independence payments, and others have been unable to have their assessments recorded at home with the DWP. Given that it was recently reported that 61% of 90,000 claimants who appealed against a PIP decision at the tribunal period up to September 2016 won their case, will the Minister today commit to a root-and-branch review of the assessment process?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Although we are consulting on ESA, the Green Paper consultation affords us the ability to look at PIP assessments in the round and at a person's whole journey. I have previously said that we are looking at what more we can do in recording assessments. If the hon. Lady knows of cases where people need home assessments and they are not getting them, I urge her to flag them up with me.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): In my own constituency of Rossendale and Darwen, those who are waiting for their PIP appeal to go through are having to wait three, six or, in some cases, nine months to have that appeal heard. Given that they receive no benefit during this period and can lose their vital Motability car, will the Minister tell us what efforts the Department will make to speed up the appeal process?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I am sorry to hear that that is happening in my hon. Friend's constituency. That is a very unusual length of time to be waiting for an appeal. If he would like to give me the details of those cases, I would be happy to look at them.

### Motability

13. **Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Whether his Department plans to publish data on the number of people who have lost their Motability scheme vehicle following their reassessment for personal independence payments. [908068]

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** Motability is an independent charity responsible for its own management information, including what data it publishes. There are 70,000 more people with a Motability car than there were in 2010.

**Ms Eagle:** My constituent Evelyn Campbell had her Motability car removed on 20 December following a PIP assessment, leaving her housebound and distressed over Christmas. It will take months for her appeal to be heard. In the meantime, her car has been sold. Is this not another cruel policy from this Government?

Given that 60% of PIP appeals are successful and that the cars have to be reprovided, is it not also a totally false economy?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Those who lose their vehicle receive transitional support through Motability, including the right to buy the vehicle and a £2,000 lump sum. Although only a small proportion of PIP decisions are appealed and overturned—

**Ms Eagle:** It is 60%.

**Penny Mordaunt:** That is of those going to appeal, not the case load. I am exploring a range of options to support claimants pending appeal, and I will be working closely with Motability on this.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I am encouraged by what the excellent Minister has just said. The key point is that I do not think the car should be withdrawn until the appeal process has finished. As it is only a small number, as the Minister has said, could she be encouraged to look at that route?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We are looking at this issue. We are also looking at those who might wish to travel overseas, for whatever reason, whether for work or a travel option, and we are working very closely with Motability to see what can be done in those instances.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908095] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Damian Green):** As part of the comprehensive package of reforms to improve mental health support announced by the Prime Minister this morning, my Department will be undertaking an expert-led review on how best to ensure that employees with mental health problems can be supported. That will involve practical help, including promoting best practice among employers and making available free tools to businesses to assist with employee wellbeing. We will also be conducting an internal review of discrimination in the workplace against people with mental health conditions. Those reviews will build on our Green Paper consultation to help to establish the evidence base around mental health and employment.

**Scott Mann:** I welcome the news that 95,000 businesses have been helped by the new enterprise allowance. Can the Minister tell me how many of those are in North Cornwall, or in Cornwall as a whole?

**Damian Green:** I too welcome those figures. I can tell my hon. Friend that the new enterprise allowance has helped to create nearly 100 new businesses in North Cornwall since it began. We are moving to a second phase, beginning this April, with an improved NEA. Since it began, over one in five businesses supported by the NEA have been started by disabled entrepreneurs, which is an extremely encouraging development.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): It was great to hear earlier that there is consensus on the need to implement in full the Financial Conduct Authority's recommendations on transparency in pension scheme costs. We hope that that will be soon, and we will hold the Government and the Minister to account on that.

Let us try another subject. Labour is committed to the state pension triple lock. Are the Government?

**Damian Green:** The Government are committed to the triple lock for the whole of this Parliament.

T3. [908098] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): Waveney District Council has been working proactively with the Department for Work and Pensions to support the roll-out of full-service universal credit. Although the council has committed considerable resources to the work, local people are still facing challenges. Can the Secretary of State assure me that his Department will urgently seek to resolve those issues that have been raised constructively by the council and other authorities through the national steering group?

**Damian Green:** I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. He and I have exchanged correspondence on this—he may not yet have received a letter from me offering a meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister for Employment. We absolutely want to work through any teething issues with local councils.

T2. [908096] **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Motor Neurone Disease Association and Parkinson's UK have welcomed Government proposals to scrap reassessment of ESA for people with severe lifelong conditions. The Secretary of State has described that reassessment as pointless, bureaucratic nonsense. Will the Government therefore now agree also to scrap reassessments in the same circumstances for people with lifelong conditions for PIP and continuing healthcare?

**The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Penny Mordaunt):** PIP is slightly different. For example, someone's needs might increase and they need a reassessment to receive more support under PIP. The Green Paper affords us the opportunity to look at all these things together. I think there are opportunities for PIP perhaps to have a lighter assessment, but we need to get the whole process right.

T7. [908102] **Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): I wrote to the Pensions Minister on 16 December about my constituent, Ruth Saunders, who drew to my attention the fact that there are certain defined-benefit pension schemes where increases are not being paid for amounts paid in before April 1997. He very kindly responded on 5 January. The point is that there is discrimination because only 10% to 15% of companies are not paying these increases. The issue is whether the amount can be corrected going forward. I would suggest that this is one of the burning injustices that the Prime Minister was talking about, and I would like a meeting with the Minister and my constituent to discuss the issue further.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Pensions (Richard Harrington):** I would be delighted to have a meeting with my right hon. Friend and her constituent.

T4. [908099] **Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The Government have thus far been reluctant to consider the fair transitional arrangements for the WASPI women, who have been unfairly disadvantaged by the changes to the women's state pension age. What action is the Secretary of State taking at present and what changes does he propose?

**Richard Harrington:** As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the Government have given £1.1 billion of transitional relief for WASPI women. The issue has been discussed in this House very many times and the Government have no plans to do anything further in that respect.

T9. [908104] **Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): Will the Minister reassure Leonard Cheshire Disability, which has a base in my constituency, that the welcome move to the Work and Health programme will not result in a large reduction in funding to help disabled people get back into work?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I can give my hon. Friend those reassurances. We are absolutely committed to closing the disability employment gap. We are picking up the pace on the programmes we are running, and asking businesses and employers to do more.

T5. [908100] **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Government have pledged to halve that disability employment gap by 2020. However, I would like to know what the Government have been doing recently to look at the impact of job cuts on the public sector. A third of the redundancies at the Equality and Human Rights Commission involve people with disabilities.

**Penny Mordaunt:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that the disability employment gap has been closing under both this Government and the coalition Government. We recognise that we need to do more, and I think the public sector can do more. Part of that is identifying particular roles that individuals can take up. The Government are picking up the pace on the issue and we are in a much better situation than the one that existed under the previous Labour Government.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): I welcome the fact that more than 1 million more women are in employment now than in 2010, but will the Minister confirm what the Government are doing to support women with children who might find it difficult to return to work because of childcare responsibilities?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Welfare Delivery (Caroline Nokes):** Our aim is to help parents to get into a job that fits around their caring responsibilities, which is why we are doubling the amount of free childcare offered to working parents to 30 hours a week. Last year, we spent a record £5 billion supporting parents with the costs of childcare and the figure will rise to more than £6 billion by 2020.

T6. [908101] **Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Finland has become the first country in Europe to pay its unemployed citizens unconditional monthly sums with the aim of boosting employment and reducing poverty. When will the UK Government fund research into similar schemes such as a universal basic income?

**Damian Green:** As I understand it, the Finnish scheme is a small pilot in a local area. I have read a lot of the literature—it is clearly an interesting idea—all of which suggests that that kind of scheme is fantastically expensive and that some of the losers from it are those who are on the lowest incomes at the moment. The polite response is that I am unconvinced by the proposal.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Seasonal agricultural workers have benefited from auto-enrolment into pensions, but many accrue only very small pension pots. What can the Government do to ensure that the bureaucratic burden does not fall disproportionately on the employers of these vital workers?

**Richard Harrington:** My hon. Friend brings up a very good point. The Government have to find a balance between wanting as many people as possible to have pensions, and economic sense when there is an impact on employers. My officials have discussed the issue with the National Farmers Union. We understand it and it will be looked into in the course of the 2017 review.

T8. [908103] **Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): How can the Government meet their target to reduce the disability employment gap—in fact, to halve it—when they are cutting by 80% the resources available to do that? Are those not just empty words?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I think the hon. Gentleman is confused: we are actually putting more resources into these initiatives, and also asking others to do more. Obviously, we are consulting in the Green Paper, but even some of the announcements the Prime Minister made today included additional resource. We very much want to meet that target, and we are putting the resources and the policies in place to do that.

**Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): Last month, I asked the Government to introduce mandatory video recording of all DWP employment and support allowance assessments because a constituent of mine in Twickenham was treated with less respect than the character in the fictional film “I, Daniel Blake”. When will mandatory video recording commence?

**Penny Mordaunt:** We are looking at a range of issues to improve the assessment process for PIP and ESA and the person’s experience of it. The recording of assessments is one of those things, so we are looking at that issue.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): For many young people, staying in the family home is not an option, so housing benefit is a lifeline not a lifestyle choice. When will the Government finally clarify how their scheme will not see these people lose vital support?

**Caroline Nokes:** The regulations regarding the removal of housing benefit from 18 to 21-year-olds have yet to be published. We will provide full details, particularly of the exemptions that will be involved, in March.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I would like to say thank you to the scores of businesses in Corby and east Northamptonshire that provide important work experience opportunities for our young people. These introductions to the world of work are crucial, so will Ministers continue to make sure they remain at the forefront of cross-departmental discussions?

**The Minister for Employment (Damian Hinds):** We know that one of the most important things in being able to get a job is to have had a job and to have demonstrated employability skills. Specifically on the work experience placements we do through Jobcentre

Plus, people spend 49 days longer on average in employment as a result of having done one, so the answer to my hon. Friend’s question is yes.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): May I urge the Secretary of State personally to review what is happening to the Motability scheme? Some 41,000 people have had their cars taken away as a result of PIP assessments, including a severely disabled Castleford constituent who now cannot get to work and may be about to lose her job, and a Pontefract constituent with metal rods in her joints who now cannot get out of the house and is at risk of slipping into depression as a result. On the day when the Prime Minister rightly raised the issue of mental health injustice, will he take seriously the serious impact on people’s mental health of being isolated in this way?

**Damian Green:** I am happy to assure the right hon. Lady that we are looking very closely at the whole Motability scheme, which, as she knows, is an independent charity. We have formed a working group to look at the various issues that gave rise to it, so we are looking at this very carefully.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Following on from the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), my constituent Ms Brookes, who has limited mobility because of a stroke, received a Motability car last year, and that car was a lifeline. Last week, the car was removed from her, and she is now struggling to get her children to school and then to get to work. She is appealing the decision, and I hope she will win, but in the meantime she is finding it incredibly hard to manage her disability as well as her responsibilities as an employee and, more importantly, a mother. Will the Minister look at this case as a matter of urgency to ensure that my constituent gets the help and support she needs?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I would be happy to look at the particular case the hon. Lady raises. We are looking at that issue in the Motability scheme, but also at other issues that mean that people are perhaps not able to take up work or travel opportunities. We recently met Motability on these issues and have formed a working group with it to work through them. We hope to be able to make some announcements very soon.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Indicators of child poverty are important, as the Secretary of State said earlier, but so are targets. Will he therefore agree to adopt the provisions in the Bill presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis), which would establish statutory targets for the reduction of child poverty?

**Damian Green:** That old-fashioned approach is not necessarily the best way forward. Having the whole range of issues that can give rise to child poverty addressed by Government policy is the best way to do it. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman’s response to the social justice Green Paper that we will publish in the coming months.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): In the London borough of Wandsworth that houses my constituency, last year there was a 25% increase in food bank use. Shockingly, almost 50% of these users are children.

Do the Government agree that this is an absolute disgrace, and what will they do to assure us in this House today that the children and adults of Tooting shall no longer have to rely on food bank use?

**Damian Green:** As I said in response to previous questions, the best route out of poverty is work, and one of the great successes of the economic policy of this Government has been that more people are in work, more women are in work, and fewer children are growing up in workless households than ever before. I just wish that Labour Members would accept that getting more people into work and reducing unemployment is the best attack on poverty that any Government can make.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is now four weeks since the Employment Minister promised Members of Parliament from Glasgow data on the new boundaries by which he wants to close half the city's jobcentres—so where is that information?

**Damian Hinds:** I met the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, and we had a Westminster Hall debate as well. I committed to a number of things, one of which was that we would have an online consultation, and that is indeed proceeding. As I said to him and his colleagues when we met, if there is other information that they want to bring forward, I am absolutely sure that they will do so.

**Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): There are 13,000 children in my constituency living in poverty—almost a third of the total poverty figure for the whole district—so will the Minister explain to my constituents his decision to close the child poverty unit?

**Damian Green:** The main function of the child poverty unit was to support Ministers in meeting the Child Poverty Act 2010, which has now been superseded by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, whereby the response specifically to poverty is being led by my Department, so the unit is now working inside the Department for Work and Pensions. That is the straightforward answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State have any new year's resolutions? If not, perhaps I can help him out: he could resolve to make sure that no one is sanctioned at Christmas. Will he review the operations of his Department, as I asked him before Christmas, to make sure that nobody goes without over the festive period?

**Damian Green:** My new year's resolution is, as ever, to make sure that my Department continues its successful work in getting ever more people into work, and to make sure that we have a benefits system that helps people to get into work and a pensions system that provides security and dignity in old age.

## Domestic Violence Victims: Cross-Examination

3.38 pm

**Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*):** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice to make a statement on the emergency review to determine how to ban perpetrators of domestic violence from directly cross-examining their victims within the family court.

**The Minister for Courts and Justice (Sir Oliver Heald):** I am very grateful to the hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for the chance to update the House on an important issue. To put this in context, the issues at stake in family proceedings are always sensitive and often complex, and the decisions of the court can have far-reaching implications for the individuals involved. The presence of domestic abuse only exacerbates an already traumatic situation, so the Government have already taken steps to make sure that victims in the family justice system have support and protection. We have protected legal aid for individuals seeking protection from abusers. We continue to invest in the court estate to improve the physical security of family courts and the emotional support available for users. We have placed particular emphasis on training for those who work in the family justice system, making sure they understand the nature and impact of domestic abuse and that they act appropriately when they come across it.

However, we know that there is more to do. As the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), made clear when this was debated in Parliament on 15 September, the Government are determined to improve the family justice response to domestic abuse, and we have worked closely with judges and others to consider what additional protections may be necessary. We are particularly concerned about the fact that unrepresented perpetrators of abuse can directly cross-examine their victims in family proceedings. I want to make family court processes safer for victims so they can themselves advocate effectively and for the safety of their children. This cannot happen while a quarter of domestic violence victims face cross-examination by their abusers.

The Lord Chancellor has requested urgent advice on how to put an end to this practice. This sort of cross-examination is illegal in the criminal courts, and I am determined to see it banned in family courts, too. We are considering the most effective and efficient way of making that happen. That will help family courts to concentrate on the key concerns for the family and always to put the children's interests first, which is what they are supposed to do. This work, which is being fast-tracked within the Department, is looking in particular at the provisions in the criminal law that prevent alleged perpetrators from cross-examining their alleged victims in criminal proceedings, and we are considering how we might apply similar provisions in the slightly different circumstances of family proceedings.

Members will appreciate that such a proposal requires thought, but we want to resolve the matter as soon as possible. We will make further details available shortly, once the work is complete. I want to thank the president

of the family division, Sir James Munby, who has argued passionately that this practice should be outlawed for good.

**Peter Kyle:** This issue has been wreaking untold devastation on victims of domestic violence. I have now spoken to numerous survivors of abuse whose accounts of torment under cross-examination in the family court—often by convicted rapists—are devastating to hear, but impossible for most of us even to imagine.

I have spoken to a woman who was cross-examined by the man who was in jail for numerous counts of rape and abuse that had left her unconscious and hospitalised. As a result of the family court process, this extremely vulnerable woman needed weeks of medication and months of counselling to recover. She has now suffered such an ordeal three times. I have spoken to the sister of a woman who was abused so grievously that the abuse resulted in her death. The convicted murderer then sued for custody of their child from the prison where he was serving a life sentence for murder. He directly cross-examined the sister of the woman he murdered, even having the grotesque nerve to ask, "What makes you think you can be a parent to my child?" Abuse is being continued and perpetuated right under the noses of judges and the police, the very institutions that should be protecting the vulnerable with every sinew of state power.

On 15 September 2016, in response to speeches by Members on both sides of the House in a Back-Bench debate, the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), said that this is a "scourge, which blights our society."—[*Official Report*, 15 September 2016; Vol. 614, c. 1119.]

Yet he made no commitment to review or to change policy. Sadly, it took the excellent coverage in *The Guardian* during the Christmas break for such a commitment to emerge from the Ministry of Justice.

The source was anonymous, so will the Minister provide clarity in these areas? Lord Justice Munby, the president of the family division, supports measures to outlaw the cross-examination of victims by perpetrators, and he has said that this will require primary legislation. Does the Minister agree with that assessment, and if so, will he make the drafting and introduction of any such legislation a priority? The anonymous source told *The Guardian* that this was a matter of urgency for the Secretary of State. Will the Minister tell the House when she started the review, and more importantly, precisely when it will be completed? Victims of abuse need to have precision and clarity at this moment of great importance for them. Speed is of the essence, but so is consultation—we need to get this right—so will the Minister tell us what process is in place to enable victims, campaigners and support organisations to feed in their essential experiences and views so that the review is at all times carried out with, not done to, survivors of domestic abuse?

Finally, as I told the House back in September, it is a source of shame to me personally that I got to the age I am today without being aware that such barbarism is being practised within our own legal system. In addition to my lack of inquisitiveness, which I regret profoundly, the secrecy imposed by law on the family court process allowed this to continue without journalistic oversight. Will the Minister consider longer term assessment of

[Peter Kyle]

the wider operational activity in the family court system? Such assessment should look, in a considered and detailed way, at the overall operation of family courts with a view to ensuring, where appropriate, greater transparency and oversight of the family court process is introduced.

**Mr Speaker:** Before we proceed, let me just say this. The hon. Gentleman has raised an extremely serious matter on the back of very considerable knowledge and research, and he has aired it in this House with great sensitivity. I did not wish to interrupt him—not least for that obvious reason—but perhaps I can announce to the House a new year’s resolution: from now on we must, without fail, stick to the established time limits for urgent questions. The hon. Gentleman was notified of the two-minute limit and he took over three minutes. That is the first point. A lot of more experienced Members will be well aware of my second point, but perhaps I can just underline it. The briefest preamble of description is fine, but an urgent question is supposed to be just that: neither a speech nor a contribution to debate, but a series of questions. I know the hon. Gentleman well and he will not, I am sure, take offence. He has raised very important matters. In future, however, doing so must be done in accordance with the proper form and time.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I agree with many of the hon. Gentleman’s points. Judges have always had wide discretion on family proceedings to try to get to the truth of matters, and to protect the interests of the family and so on. Judges have discretion to ask the questions themselves to try to avoid situations arising that are against the interests of justice. In recent years, judges have become more concerned—as the hon. Gentleman has—about situations where abuse is being perpetrated through the proceedings. That is why Sir James Munby has spoken out, why I have made the comments I have made today, and why the Department is treating this as something that should be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Is it necessary to change the law? The answer is yes it is. Primary legislation would be necessary to ban cross-examination. I also think there are related ancillary matters that would require primary legislation. Clauses, therefore, are required. Is work being done? Yes, work is being done at a great pace to ensure that all these matters are dealt with in a comprehensive and effective way—the urgency is there. I became the Minister responsible for these matters in October, and I have chaired the Family Justice Board, which has become very concerned about this issue over that period. The Lord Chancellor shares that concern, which is why we are moving at speed to try to tackle it.

The extent to which consultation is necessary is something I will consider in the light of the hon. Gentleman’s comments, and perhaps discuss with him privately if he wishes. My feeling is that what is required is pretty straightforward: a ban, and then the necessary ancillary measures to allow cross-examination without the perpetrator doing it. I would question, therefore, the extent to which a wide consultation is needed, but I will discuss that with him.

On transparency in the courts, journalists are now able to attend court and report the proceedings, although there are obvious restrictions to protect children and so on.

**Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con):** The Minister of State and the Lord Chancellor are to be congratulated on moving promptly on this matter. The president of the family division is also to be congratulated on his frankness in relation to the deficiencies he finds within the family jurisdiction. Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that the simple solution is to adopt, more or less lock, stock and barrel, the criminal procedures under the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999; to use the forthcoming courts and prison reform Bill to put that into primary law; and accept that the very modest public expenditure of a court-appointed advocate to do the cross-examination where justice so requires would be a drop in the ocean compared with the benefits, in the interests of justice, to individuals who are the victims of abuse?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I am grateful to the Chair of the Justice Committee for those comments and agree with a good many of them. There are some differences from criminal proceedings, for example in a case in which an injunction is sought and there is no charge, or a case in which money is being considered but there is a background of abuse. There is a range of issues. For legal aid in cases of domestic abuse in family proceedings, there is a wider list than is available for criminal proceedings, but his basic point is right.

I am not able to give a commitment on the Bill. It depends on how quickly the work is concluded, and I am working on it very quickly.

**Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) for asking the urgent question and the Minister for his response. I recognise that this issue unites the House.

The practice of unrepresented parties against whom domestic violence is either proved or alleged questioning victims in court has been raised repeatedly in the House and in the media. Many Members on both sides of the House have constituents who have been left devastated by the experience. That the Government are doing something to end that practice is welcome, but there is a clear admission that their legal aid cuts have caused this situation. The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 removed much family law from eligibility. Victims of domestic violence struggle to provide evidence of their abuse because they are frequently not believed, and in some cases because medical evidence is difficult to obtain. Their experience is made worse still because their abuser, who is also unable to get representation, is allowed to question them, even when they would be prevented from contacting the person in any other situation. The abuse therefore continues.

It need not be that way. In the criminal courts, cross-examination by an unrepresented party accused of domestic violence is not allowed. Is the Ministry of Justice counting the number of litigants in person in the family courts? How many of those are victims of domestic violence? How many are convicted or alleged to have committed domestic violence? Will the Minister look at the practice in criminal courts? Along with prohibiting

cross-examination, will he introduce the greater use of more sensitive procedures? When will the LASPO review finally begin?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** On the hon. Lady's final point, as she knows, the LASPO review has to be concluded by April 2018. It is not overdue, but it is something that the Government have very much in mind, and that we will have to start fairly shortly.

On the hon. Lady's other points, legal aid is available in cases of domestic abuse. That is why the Government concentrated efforts in legal aid on situations where life or liberty are at stake, and on domestic abuse and housing when homes are at risk. That is not an issue, but I accept that the evidence criteria are important. That is why the Government have allowed a longer period and a wider range of evidence to be used, which has been welcomed.

Cross-examination by litigants in person takes place too much. The hon. Lady asked what the exact number is. It is not clear, but it is certainly a considerable number, which is why the Government consider this to be an important issue to tackle.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister and welcome everything he has said on the Government's attitude to this long-standing problem. May I urge him please to look at the rules on legal aid? There is certainly strong anecdotal evidence from former colleagues of mine at the family bar and the judiciary that there is a direct consequence and link between the rise in litigants in person and the changes to legal aid, which was begun under the Labour Government. That link between litigants in person and legal aid is causing so much of the problem. If he at least looks at it, he could provide some of the solution.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** As my right hon. Friend rightly says, this is a long-standing issue but one that has now become urgent—the cries for help from judges and others have become more urgent—and that is why the Government are tackling it. It is necessary to find a way to prevent litigants in person from using proceedings to continue the abuse, and that is what we aim to do.

**Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP):** May I welcome the Justice Secretary's emergency review and stress how important it is that we all focus, across the UK, on how to prevent the perpetrators of domestic abuse from using the processes of the justice system to re-victimise the survivors of domestic abuse? In Scotland, the Government are engaged in a significant overhaul of the justice system, ahead of the introduction of new legislation on an all-encompassing offence of domestic abuse that will include all forms of coercive behaviour, but in Scotland legal aid is widely available in both criminal and civil cases. In England and Wales, cuts to legal aid mean that 80% of family cases now see at least one party without a lawyer, while in 60% of cases in the family courts neither party has one. In addition, victims of domestic abuse can only access legal aid in England and Wales if they cross a threshold test that has already been found to be too restrictive in a judicial review case. In addition to this important review, we therefore need a review of the criteria for access to legal aid for victims and survivors of domestic abuse. When will the Government commit to such a review?

**Mr Speaker:** Splendid! The hon. and learned Lady elided into a question just in time.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I thank the hon. and learned Lady for that and for her news from Scotland. On legal aid in England and Wales, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) deliberately decided to concentrate the effort on cases involving people's life, liberty, home or, as in this case, domestic abuse. Given that it was a period of austerity and decisions had to be made, I believe he got that judgment right. On the criteria for legal aid and the evidence that needs to be provided, it is not as though the Government have said, "This is set in stone"; where criticisms have been made, we have changed the rules to tackle those criticisms. My overall point is that the Government are responding when we should be.

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** I welcome my right hon. and learned Friend's announcements today and his work with the Lord Chancellor, but may I draw his attention to a report published last April by the all-party group on domestic violence, chaired by myself and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), that not only picked up on this issue of cross-examination but considered special measures in courts to make it easier for some of the most vulnerable victims to give evidence without feeling intimidated?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's work in this area and for the important work of the all-party group, of which the Government and the ministerial committee on violence against women and girls take particular note. On special measures, the family courts have always had available to them a wider set of tools than the criminal courts and their judges have a wide discretion. Such measures as cross-examination by video, which in the criminal courts is provided for under section 28 of the 1999 Act, can be taken in family cases. Family courts can take evidence in a wide variety of ways, so there is a lot of protection. As I said in response to the urgent question, however, we are going further. Measures to do with the court estate, such as ensuring separate waiting rooms, screens and all those sorts of physical aspects, are being covered, as is staff training, through the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service and so on. That is very important, too.

**Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab):** I am grateful to the Minister for highlighting the discretion already available, but given that primary legislation might take some time, what steps is he taking now to remind the judiciary of the discretion they have and how they can apply it?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** The hon. Lady makes an important point. As she will know, there are practice directions in the family division, and one is being prepared at the moment, so I will make sure that her comments are taken well on board. We do not make the practice directions, but we can certainly pass on her comments.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** I and my staff have been struck in my constituency surgeries by the clear feedback on this anomaly around cross-examination. One of my constituents who complained about it was a former police officer. May I urge the Minister to take every step and use every tool possible to get the matter resolved as soon as possible?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** We all have examples—I am glad that my hon. Friend was able to get her example on the record—of cases where some form of abuse has occurred in the courts. That is unconscionable and it needs to stop. We are going to tackle this issue very urgently.

**Mr Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On who should be involved and consulted in the review, will the Minister bear in mind that party litigants cross-examining their victims is just one species of the controlling behaviour that lies at the heart of domestic abuse and that, for that reason, there is a real and important role for organisations such as Women’s Aid to have their voices heard in this process?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and the Department does, of course, listen to what is said by Women’s Aid. It does seem to me that this is a fairly discrete issue—an issue about banning cross-examination by alleged perpetrators and making arrangements to ensure that cross-examination can take place in a suitable way. I would not want to sacrifice speed in tackling that for anything.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Last week, the country was shocked and saddened by the death of my constituent, Jill Seward, who campaigned tirelessly on behalf of victims of rape and sexual violence, following her own horrific personal ordeal. Jill was instrumental in the campaign to change the law, so that accused rapists are barred from cross-examining victims. Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in paying tribute to Jill and expressing our sincere condolences to her family, and does he agree that it is absolutely right to extend this law to the victims of domestic violence?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I certainly believe it important to pay tribute to Jill Seward, who suffered the most vile ordeal, yet showed through the rest of her life what a wonderful person she was, by campaigning for others and doing a tremendous amount of charity work. She was a model, and someone who set an example of being good. Yes, I would like to pass on the law that applies to criminal cases into family cases, so that we can tackle the sort of abuse that has been described.

**Karl Turner** (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab): I declare my interest as a member of the Wilberforce barrister chambers in Hull, although I am not currently practising. I welcome the Justice Secretary’s position to bring forward a review on this important issue, but the Minister will know that this was created as a result of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. The truth is that the vast majority of people today are refused legal representation in family proceedings unless they can prove domestic violence, which is virtually impossible to prove. The Government should bring forward a review of LASPO, which is not working. They should do something about it.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but there will be a review of LASPO. It is something that we have promised, and the date by which it has to be completed is April 2018. We are committed to that. As for family proceedings, I think it right that families can come together in many cases and reach agreements, so we do not have the problem that the hon. Gentleman

outlined. Where abuse is present for a significant number of individuals, it is important that in those cases the individual who is the victim should not be cross-examined by the alleged perpetrator. That is what we want to solve.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** We earlier heard a Cherry, and now we can hear a Berry.

**Jake Berry:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I congratulate the Minister and the Lord Chancellor on taking action regarding the travesty of litigants in person being able to cross-examine their victims. In his statement, the Minister referred to the problem as urgent and said that it has the utmost priority. When the review is complete, will he commit to bring this forward as emergency legislation? I think that would gain support from both sides of the House, and we could pass the legislation in one day, ensuring that we can bring about the change as quickly as possible.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I think that the importance of that issue is accepted throughout the House. Whether or not my hon. Friend’s suggestion is an appropriate way to deal with it, one thing is clear: it should be dealt with as a matter of urgency, and that is what I am committed to doing.

Perhaps I should have said earlier that there were instances in which this problem arose before LASPO. It is not a new problem, and many people were refused legal aid representation under the Labour Government.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): The Minister has said seven times that he is “dealing with it urgently”. When will we see the result?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** The answer that Members receive from the Dispatch Box is, of course, “shortly”, and that is what I have said, but it does mean shortly.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The Government’s reforms of the family courts were designed to keep some of these antagonistic cases out of court altogether, but the legal aid changes have undoubtedly led to the involvement of more litigants in person in very sensitive cases. Does my right hon. and learned Friend acknowledge the problems that litigants in person are causing in relation to court resources? They often spin out the time that cases take, with judges themselves requiring constant advice on legal procedures. We really need to do something about that, because it is messing up the family courts.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I fully accept that how litigants in person are helped with court proceedings is important, and the Government are spending £3.5 million on helping them. Let me make another point with which my hon. Friend may agree. Not every case needs to be decided in court; I am a strong supporter of mediation, and I should like to see more of that.

**Dr Eilidh Whiteford** (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): The emergency review is welcome, but cross-examination is not the only way in which perpetrators exploit family court processes to perpetuate their abuse. Will the review

consider the ways in which abusers can, for example, string out judicial process in the family courts to continue to abuse former partners and their children?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I should be happy to discuss the issue with the hon. Lady, and to look into it in due course. This, however, is a discrete matter and an important one. I should like it to be tackled swiftly, and I do not intend to widen what we are doing at present, because I want to get on with that.

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): Women's Aid has raised this issue on a number of occasions, most recently in its important and hard-hitting report "Nineteen Child Homicides", which revealed that 25% of women interviewed had been cross-examined and that one woman who had been raped, beaten and abused for six years was cross-examined for three hours. Notwithstanding the need to get it right in the review, will my right hon. and learned Friend introduce legislation as soon as possible to ensure that that can never happen again?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** My hon. Friend has highlighted an important case, as well as the work done by Women's Aid. He is right to say that that issue needs to be tackled urgently.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The need for training of the judiciary goes beyond the family courts. A constituent came to see me because her ex-partner had taken a case about the management of family property to the civil court, and the judge had said it was irrelevant that he had been imprisoned for raping her daughter. That cannot be right. Judges need to be trained as well.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** It would not, of course, have been a family justice case; it would have been a civil case. I agree with the hon. Lady that that is an important consideration, and I will look into it.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I welcome what the Minister has said today and his commitment to legislation, but in the meantime will he ensure that the best support is available to vulnerable victims before, during and after the proceedings?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** As I said in my initial response, a great deal of effort has gone into training both CAFCASS and court staff to provide the emotional support that is needed.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): I think that we all welcome the tone of what the Minister has said today, but this is supposed to be an urgent review, and many women are going through cases of this kind right now. Will the Minister make it clear that the review will be concluded by Easter at the latest and that we can then hope to see improvements in our courts?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** Yes.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): I welcome the tone of the Minister's remarks so far. Does he agree that the point about legal aid misses the fact that some of these perpetrators are almost certainly using the ability to cross-examine their victims as a tactic in the courts?

As that is motivating what they are doing, it is even more important that this plug in the law is made to stop this practice continuing.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** My hon. Friend and a number of other colleagues are saying that cross-examining the victim in these circumstances is a form of abuse in itself. I agree, which is why we are keen to conclude this review on a short timetable, as I said to the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves).

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for the terms in which he has replied to the urgent question. He has talked this afternoon about the urgency of this issue and I think that he has accepted the words of the president of the family division of the High Court, Sir James Munby, that primary legislation would be needed. What commitment can the Minister give to the survivors of domestic violence and abuse that change to primary legislation will be brought forward urgently?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I can certainly give the assurance I have already given, which is that we are tackling this as a matter of urgency. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is a busy legislative timetable with all sorts of matters to do with Europe and the like, and we will have to see what exactly can be achieved in terms of the legislative timetable, but I want to tackle this urgently.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): On behalf of my constituent Claire Throssell, whose two children were murdered by her ex-husband, I welcome this review, but in the debate in September that I co-sponsored, the Under-Secretary at the Minister's side, the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee), made a clear commitment to overhauling the culture of the family courts and in particular to a review of practice direction 12. Are the Government still committed to that broader set of changes, which we so urgently need?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Lady has done on this issue. I chair the Family Justice Board with the Minister for Vulnerable Children and Families. We are committed to improving the overall way in which the courts work and are in the process of introducing a new practice direction in the area of victims. This is certainly a point we are very much alive to.

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): Everyone who has spoken today, including the Minister, has said the situation is urgent. In view of that and the fact that he said primary legislation will be needed, is there any reason why he cannot commit to the Government presenting that within three or four months?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** As I have said, we are keen to complete this review as a matter of urgency. The legislative programme is a complex matter at the moment for reasons I have hinted at, so we will have to see what is possible, but we would like to tackle this urgently.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The focus of questions has understandably been on domestic violence, but can the Minister confirm he is also seeking to implement this protection for victims of

[John Woodcock]

emotional and financial control and other forms of non-violent abuse, which the Government have, to their great credit, sought to criminalise in recent months?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, there is a cross-governmental approach to abuse that has its own definitions and so on, but the areas of abuse covered in terms of applications for legal aid are far wider than just physical violence and include sex abuse cases and the like, and we are alive to the need to cover a wider area than simply domestic violence.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): While I appreciate the urgency and scope of the investigation, will the Minister give consideration to cases where the Department for Work and Pensions is sharing domestic abuse victims' information with the perpetrators of the crime when making decisions about benefits claimants? The anonymity of a constituent of mine was taken away from her and the information was passed on by the DWP.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I am sure that the hon. Lady is making an important point. If she wants to write to me or speak to me about it, I would be more than happy to look at it, but this is not what we are doing in this exercise of looking at the cross-examination of victims by perpetrators or alleged perpetrators. We are tackling a discrete, narrow area, and we want to do this urgently. Her point is important, but it concerns a different matter.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Survivors of domestic abuse tell us that they feel re-victimised and re-traumatised by their experiences in the family courts. Will the Minister please give us more clarity on how the voices and views of survivors of domestic abuse will be considered in this emergency review?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** My view is that this is a narrow issue involving banning perpetrators or alleged perpetrators from cross-examining victims, as we do in criminal cases. That is a narrow issue on which I think we all agree. The sort of arrangements that will need to be put in place have already been tried in the criminal courts. If

the hon. Lady has any particular ideas or concerns, I would obviously be happy to discuss them with her, but I do not think that this is a complicated matter. It is a simple one that needs urgent action.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I am aware that this focuses on the adult victims of domestic abuse, but research from Safelives has shown that an estimated 130,000 children in the UK live in households with a high risk of domestic abuse and a significant risk of harm or death. Thousands more live with other levels of domestic abuse every day. Will the Minister please clarify that, as recommended by Women's Aid, there should not be an assumption of shared parenting in child contact cases where domestic abuse is a feature?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** The hon. Lady makes an important point, and the courts are clearly alive to this matter. We have to give some discretion, however, because family cases involve a wide range of factors. I think that the judges do a good job. I want to put on record that these are not easy cases and that our judges have to have an element of discretion. I would like to ensure that that remains the case, although I acknowledge that she makes a good point.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): A constituent who came to see me was extremely distressed because her husband was repeatedly taking her back to the family court over access issues. She was not only undergoing cross-examination but being driven into financial poverty through constantly having to fund her own defence. Will the Minister look at how the courts can deal with the vexatious, repeated requests relating to access that are behind a lot of coercive behaviour and at the financial poverty that families find themselves in as a result?

**Sir Oliver Heald:** The hon. Lady makes an important point, and I should like to pay tribute to the work that she does in this area. I am more than happy to raise that point in the Family Justice Board and to look at the matter, but it is not part of the important work that we are doing to deal urgently with the question of cross-examination. Her point bears on that work, but it is not the focus of what we are doing at the moment. We will, however, look into it.

## Mental Health and NHS Performance

4.18 pm

### **The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):**

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on mental health and NHS performance. This Government are committed to a shared society in which public services work to the highest standards for everyone. This includes plans announced by the Prime Minister this morning on mental health. I am proud that, under this Government, 1,400 more people are accessing mental health services every day compared with in 2010 and that we are investing more in mental health than ever before, with plans for 1 million more people with mental health conditions to access services by 2020.

But we recognise that there is more to do, so we will proceed with plans to further improve mental health provision, including: formally accepting the recommendations of the independent taskforce on mental health, which will see mental health spend increase by £1 billion a year by the end of the Parliament; a Green Paper on children and young people's mental health to be published before the end of the year; enabling every secondary school to train someone in mental health first aid; a new partnership with employers to support mental health in the workplace; up to £15 million extra invested in places of safety for those in crisis, following the highly successful start to the programme in the last Parliament; an ambitious expansion of digital mental health provision; and an updated and more comprehensive suicide prevention strategy. Further details of these plans are contained in the written ministerial statement laid before the House this morning.

I turn now to the winter. As our most precious public service, the NHS has been under sustained pressure for a number of years. In just six years the number of people aged over 80 has risen by 340,000, and life expectancy has risen by 12 months. As a result, demand is unprecedented. The Tuesday after Christmas was the busiest day in the history of the NHS, and some hospitals are reporting that A&E attendances are up to 30% higher than last year. I therefore want to set out how we intend to protect the service through an extremely challenging period and sustain it for the future.

First, I pay tribute to staff on the frontline. The 1.3 million NHS staff, alongside another 1.4 million in the social care system, do an incredible job, which is frankly humbling for all of us in this House. An estimated 150,000 medical staff, and many more non-medical staff, worked on Christmas day and new year's day. They have never worked harder to keep patients safe, and the whole country is in their debt.

This winter, the NHS has made more extensive preparations than ever before. We started the run-up to the winter period with over 1,600 more doctors and 3,000 more nurses than just a year ago, bringing the total increase since 2010 to 11,400 more doctors and 11,200 more hospital nurses. The NHS allocated £400 million to local health systems for winter preparedness; it nationally assured the winter plans of every trust; it launched the largest ever flu vaccination programme, with more than 13 million people already vaccinated; and it bolstered support outside A&Es, with 12,000 additional GP sessions offered over the festive period.

The result has been that this winter has already seen days when A&Es have treated a record number of people within four hours, and there have been fewer serious incidents declared than many expected. As Chris Hopson, head of NHS Providers, said, although there have been serious problems at some trusts, the system as a whole is doing slightly better than last year.

However, there are indeed a number of trusts where the situation has been extremely fragile. All of last week's A&E divers happened in 19 trusts, of which four are in special measures. The most recent statistics show that nearly three quarters of trolley waits occurred in just two trusts. In Worcestershire, in particular, there have been a number of unacceptably long trolley waits, and the media have reported two deaths of patients in A&E. We are also aware of ongoing problems in North Midlands, with extremely high numbers of 12-hour trolley waits. Nationally, the NHS has taken urgent action to support those trusts, including working intensively with leadership and brokering conversations with social care partners to generate a joined-up approach across systems of concern.

As of this weekend, there are some signs that pressure is easing both in the most distressed trusts and across the system. However, with further cold weather on the way this weekend, a spike in respiratory infections and a rise in flu, there will be further challenges ahead. NHS England and NHS Improvement will also consider a series of further measures that may be taken in particularly distressed systems on a temporary basis at the discretion of local clinical leaders. These may include: temporarily releasing time for GPs to support urgent care work; clinically triaging non-urgent calls to the ambulance service for residents of nursing and residential homes before they are taken to hospital; continuing to suspend elective care, including, where appropriate, suspension of non-urgent outpatient appointments; working with the Care Quality Commission on rapid re-inspection where this has the potential to re-open community health and social care bed capacity; and working with community trusts and community nursing teams to speed up discharge. Taken together, these actions will give the NHS the flexibility to take further measures as and when appropriate at a local level.

However, looking to the future, it is clear we need to have an honest discussion with the public about the purpose of A&E departments. Nowhere outside the UK commits to all patients to sort out any urgent health need within four hours. Only four other countries—New Zealand, Sweden, Australia and Canada—have similar national standards, which are generally less stringent than ours. This Government are committed to maintaining and delivering that vital four-hour commitment to patients, but since it was announced in 2000, there are nearly 9 million more visits to our A&Es, up to 30% of which NHS England estimates do not need to be made, and the tide is continuing to rise. If we are going to protect our four-hour standard, we need to be clear that it is a promise to sort out all urgent health problems within four hours, but not all health problems, however minor. As Professor Keith Willett, NHS England's medical director for acute care, has said, no country in the world has a standard for all health problems, however small, and if we are to protect services for the most vulnerable, nor can we.

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

NHS England and NHS Improvement will continue to explore ways to ensure that at least some of the patients who do not need to be in our A&Es can be given good, alternative options, building on progress under way with a streaming policy in the NHS England A&E plan. In this way, we will be able to improve the patient experience for those with more minor conditions who are currently not seen within four hours, as well as protect the four-hour promise for those who actually need it.

Taken together, what I have announced today are plans to support the NHS in a difficult period; and plans for a Government who are ambitious for our NHS, quite simply, to offer the safest, highest-quality care available anywhere, for both mental and physical health. But they will take time to come to fruition, and in the meantime all our thoughts are with NHS and social care staff who are working extremely hard over the winter, and throughout the year, both inside and outside our hospitals. I commend this statement to the House.

4.27 pm

**Jonathan Ashworth** (Leicester South) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for an advance copy of his statement. I, too, begin by paying tribute to all the NHS staff who are working day in, day out to provide the best possible care to patients during this busy period. Of course we welcome measures to improve mental health services in this country, as indeed we welcomed such announcements exactly 12 months ago, when the then Prime Minister made similar promises. But does the Secretary of State not agree that if this Prime Minister wants to shine a light on mental health provision, she should aim her torch at the Government's record: 6,600 fewer nurses working in mental health; a reduction in mental health beds; 400 fewer doctors working in mental health; and, perhaps most disgracefully of all, the raiding of children's local mental health budgets in order to plug funding gaps in the wider NHS? Could he therefore tell us why the Prime Minister was unable to confirm this morning that money for mental health would be ring-fenced to prevent this raiding of budgets from happening in the future? We welcome measures to improve mental health support in schools. Will the Government offer more resources to local authority education psychologists? What provision will be in place to give teachers suitable training for doing this work?

On the winter crisis, this morning the Secretary of State said that things have only been "falling over in a couple of places". Let us look at the facts: a third of hospitals declared last month that they needed urgent help to deal with the number of patients coming through the doors; A&E departments have turned patients away more than 140 times; 15 hospitals ran out of beds in one day in December; several hospitals have warned that they cannot offer comprehensive care; and elderly patients have been left languishing on hospital trolleys in corridors, sometimes for more than 24 hours. And he says that care is only falling over in a couple of places! I know that "La La Land" did well at the Golden Globes last night, but I did not realise the Secretary of State was living there—perhaps that is where he has been all weekend. Will he confirm that the NHS is facing a winter crisis, and that the blame lies at the doors of No. 10 Downing Street?

Does the Secretary of State agree that it was a monumental error to ignore the pleas for extra support for social care to be included in the autumn statement only weeks ago? Will he support calls to bring forward now the extra £700 million that is allocated for 2019, to help social care? Will he urge the Chancellor and the Prime Minister to announce a new funding settlement for the NHS and social care in the March Budget so that a crisis like this year's never happens again?

I press the Secretary of State further on the announcement he has just made on the four-hour A&E target. Is he really telling patients that rather than trying to hit that four-hour target, the Government are now in fact rewriting and downgrading it? If so, does NHS England support that move? What guidance has he had from the Royal College of Emergency Medicine to say that that is an appropriate change to the waiting-time standard?

The Secretary of State has made patient safety an absolute priority; in that, he has our unswerving support. I am sure he will agree that one of the most upsetting reports to come out of hospitals last week was that on the death of two patients at Worcestershire Royal hospital who had been waiting on trolleys. Will he commit to personally lead an inquiry into those deaths? Does he know whether they were isolated incidents? When does the trust intend to report back on its investigation? Will he undertake to keep the House updated on those matters?

There is no doubt that the current crisis could have been averted. Hospital bosses, council leaders, patients groups and MPs from both sides of the House urged the Chancellor to give the NHS and social care extra money in the autumn statement. Those requests fell on deaf ears and we are now seeing the dismal consequences. NHS staff deserve better. Patients deserve better. The Government need to do better. I urge the Health Secretary to get a grip.

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman's comments and, indeed, to the comments of all Members, but I shall first say this about the tone of what he said. He speaks as if the NHS never had any problems over winters when Labour was in power. The one thing NHS staff do not want right now is for any party to start weaponising the NHS for party political purposes. I remind him that when his party runs the NHS, the number of people on waiting lists for treatments doubles, A&E performance is 10% lower and people wait twice as long to have their hips replaced. Whatever the problems are in the NHS, Labour is not the solution.

The hon. Gentleman talked about mental health, so let me tell him what is happening on that. Thanks to the efforts of this Government and the Conservative-led coalition, we now have some of the highest dementia diagnosis rates in the world. Our talking therapies programme—one of the most popular programmes for the treatment of depression and anxiety—is treating 750,000 more people every year and is being copied in Sweden. Every day, we are treating 1,400 more people with mental health conditions and we have record numbers of psychiatrists. The hon. Gentleman mentioned mental health nurses: in this Parliament we are training 8,000 more, which is a 22% increase.

All that is backed up by what we are confirming today, which has not been done before: the Government are accepting the report of the independent taskforce

review—led by Paul Farmer, the chief executive of Mind—which commits us to spending £1 billion more a year on mental health by the end of the Parliament. That would not be possible with the spending commitments that Labour was prepared to make for the NHS in the previous Parliament. It is because of this Government's funding that we are able to make such commitments on mental health.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the NHS and gave completely the wrong impression of what I said this morning. I was completely clear that all NHS hospitals are operating under greater pressure than they ever have. He should listen to independent voices, such as that of Chris Hopson—no friend of the Government when it comes to NHS policy—who is clear that in the vast majority of trusts people are actually coping slightly better than last year. However, we have some very serious problems in a few trusts, including in Worcestershire and a number of others. I can commit to him that we will follow closely the investigations into the two reported deaths at Worcestershire and keep the House updated.

The hon. Gentleman talked about social care, which is where, I think, his politicising goes wrong. Last year, spending on social care went up by around £600 million. At the last election, he stood on a platform of not a penny more to local authorities for social care, so to stand here as a defender of social care is, frankly, an insult to vulnerable people up and down the country, particularly to those living under Labour councils such as Hounslow, Merton and Ealing, which are refusing to raise the social care precept, but complaining about social care funding.

The hon. Gentleman talked more generally about NHS funding, but in the last Parliament it was not the Conservatives who wanted to cut funding for the NHS—it was his party. It was not the Conservatives who said that funding the five-year forward view was impossible—it was his party. Labour said that the cheque would bounce. Well, it has not bounced, and we are putting in that money.

In conclusion, it is tough on the NHS frontline. The hon. Gentleman was right to raise this issue in this House, but wrong to raise it in the way that he did. Under this Government, the NHS has record numbers of doctors and nurses and record funding. Despite the pressures of winter, care is safer, of higher quality and reaching more people than ever before. It is time to support those on the frontline, and not try to use them for party political points.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the Prime Minister's focus on mental health in her speech today. She spoke of holding the NHS leadership to account for the extra £1 billion that we will be investing in mental health. Will the Secretary of State set out in further detail how clinical commissioning groups will be held to account for ensuring that that money gets to the frontline so that we can deliver progress on parity of esteem?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes, I can do that. It is a very important point. We have had a patchy record in the NHS of ensuring that money promised for mental health actually reaches the frontline. The way that we intend to address this is by creating independently compiled Ofsted-style ratings for every CCG in the country that highlight

where mental health provision is inadequate. Those ratings are decided by an independent committee chaired by Paul Farmer, who is responsible for the independent taskforce report, so he is able to check up on progress towards his recommendations. I am confident that, by doing that, we will be able to shine a light on those areas that are not delivering on the promises that this Government have made to the country.

**Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): After the Health Committee's recent inquiry into suicide, I absolutely welcome the extra funding for mental health. I am sure that the Secretary of State remembers some of the discussions that we had in that room.

I also pay tribute to the staff. Obviously, with my background, I know exactly what it is like when A&E is swamped and there is nowhere to put people. The staff across NHS England are not afraid of us discussing this topic and weaponising it. They are in tears; they are exhausted; and they are demoralised. They have never experienced a winter like this. Perhaps the Secretary of State will explain why his figures suggest 19 diverts and only two trusts in serious problems, whereas we are hearing from the Nuffield Trust that that 42 or 50 trusts are diverting, which is a third. That means that the problem is widespread.

I totally agree with the point about people going to A&E when they do not need to be there, but they are not the people who are three-deep on trolleys waiting for a bed for 36 hours—those are people who need a bed and who are there because they are ill. We have discussed sustainability and transformation plans and NHS sustainability on several occasions. The concern that people have is that, because there is not the money for a redesign, there will be A&E closures and bed cuts. I hope that this incident will show that that is simply not possible. It is not possible for the UK, particularly NHS England, to lose any more beds. In Scotland, we face the same problem of increased demand and shortage of doctors, yet 93.5% of our patients were seen within four hours in Christmas week. The president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine estimates that in areas of England the figure is between 50% and 60%. That difference is down to how it is organised. It is the fragmentation and the lack of integration. There are things that can be done. We can use community pharmacies and GPs, and try to bring the NHS back together.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope that the hon. Lady will not take offence—she has vast experience in this field—if I say that her questions must be judged to be rhetorical, because I did not observe any question marks, although I am sure we will in future.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): You were handy at that.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, but that was then, and this is now. That was when I was a badly behaved Back Bencher like the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Hunt:** I will try to interpret the questions in what the hon. Lady said. If she was asking whether the problems in England are similar to those in Scotland, I think that we share problems, particularly across the busy winter period. She has observed that Scotland is

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also failing to meet the target. She is right to say that bed capacity is absolutely critical, and that is something we have not always got right in England. There have been times when beds have been decommissioned and the alternative provision that was promised has not been made, which has big knock-on effects. When it comes to what happens in Scotland and England, I think that Scotland has gone further than England in the use of community pharmacy, which is to be commended, but England has gone further in our plans to reform and increase investment into general practice. That was what the president of the Royal College of General Practitioners was talking about over Christmas when she said that she was keen for Scotland to match the package that we have in England.

**Alistair Burt** (North East Bedfordshire) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend's statement. Of course, we all know the work that is done in our local areas by all those working in the NHS at such a difficult time. In relation to mental health, will he confirm that the Prime Minister's very welcome speech this morning also emphasised the importance of perinatal mental health, and that some of the extra resource will continue the great work on that? Will he also emphasise the point about transparency, because knowing what CCGs are doing assists Members of Parliament not only in calling for extra resource, but in ensuring that our areas do the best they can compared with others, rather than simply making a general point about resources, which is always the easiest point to make?

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. Friend did a huge amount of good work on mental health when he was a colleague in the Department of Health. On perinatal mental health, we know that 20% of mothers suffer some form of pre or post-natal depression, which has a huge impact on the child, with lifetime costs of around £10,000 for every birth in this country, caused by lack of proper mental health provision. The plan announced today means that we will be able to treat an extra 30,000 women better—we think that is the number who need to be treated. He makes an important point about transparency. I would put it like this: funding matters, and we have some of the best mental health provision in the world, but it is not consistent. The only way that we can make it consistent is by shining a light on the relative performance of different parts of the country, so that we can bring all areas up to the standard of the best.

**Mr Skinner:** The Minister says that there are 9 million more patient visits now than there were in 2000. Is he aware that in that climate, shutting hospitals such as the Bolsover community hospital, led by the Hardwick clinical commissioning group, makes no sense at all? He turns a blind eye to it. Will he look at this question, because when those hospitals are shut, the beds are gone forever? Get stuck in.

**Mr Hunt:** I actually think that broadly the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. It is not just about decisions to downgrade or close A&E departments when there is no alternative provision; it is also about community hospitals, which are very important places for A&E departments and hospitals to step people

down to. He is right to say that the NHS—[*Interruption.*] I am getting comments from a sedentary position. With the greatest respect, this process has been going on in the NHS for decades, and I do not think that we always got it right under both parties, but I think that he is right to say that when there are changes in provision in community hospitals, we need to ensure that we have good alternative plans.

**Mr Speaker:** In wishing the hon. Members for Morley and Outwood and for Filton and Bradley Stoke all the best in the weeks and months ahead, I call Andrea Jenkyns.

**Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. First, I echo some of the points made by the Secretary of State regarding mental health support for expectant mothers. As one myself, I have to say that the midwives have been fantastic. Right from the very first appointments at grassroots level, they mention mental health, so we are feeling the support on the ground.

I welcome today's statement, which shows the Government's commitment to mental health by making it a centrepiece of the agenda. One in 50 young people in Yorkshire receive care for mental health. How will the new approach address the concerns of the young people and their parents, and what measures are in place to reduce the waiting list for child and adolescent mental health services?

**Mr Hunt:** I add to Mr Speaker's comments my very good wishes and confidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Andrea Jenkyns) will get superb care from the NHS. I thank her for campaigning on patient safety. I am sure she will be pleased to hear that our principal safety campaign this year is on maternity safety.

In bald numbers, the plan will mean that we will treat 1 million more people with mental health conditions a year by the end of this Parliament. Of course, many of those will be in Yorkshire. An additional 70,000 young people will get treatment every single year and I hope that will bring down the CAMHS waiting times. We also want to do work in schools to prevent people from getting on the CAMHS waiting list in the first place.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): The YoungMinds survey published before Christmas showed a failure in 50% of clinical commissioning group areas to spend the full amount of extra investment allocated to children and young people's mental health. That is scandalous. I note the Secretary of State's point about Ofsted-style ratings, but does he not need to introduce a system that guarantees that the money the Government promised for children's mental health is actually spent as intended?

**Mr Hunt:** The right hon. Gentleman is right to want to ensure that we live up to those promises. He was a Minister when some of those promises were made and they are very important. I would say that we are delivering what he wants. We are on track this year to spend around £1 billion more, compared with two years ago when he was Minister for mental health. It has taken time for the NHS to get the message on mental health, but it is getting through loud and clear.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): As a frequent user and admirer of the Red Cross, I regard its claims as being grossly over the top. I join the Secretary of State in his tribute to the wonderful work of the frontline staff of the NHS at a very difficult time. Does he agree that the pressures are not going to go away, and that there must be a continuing drive for reform and to do these things better? What exactly are the impediments in the NHS to the sharing of best practice, and what steps is he taking to create a more experienced and better trained leadership who are more prepared for the exceptional medical and management challenges that the NHS now faces?

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. Friend speaks extremely wisely. I, too, think that we have to be very careful about the language we use in these situations because many vulnerable people can be frightened if we get the tone wrong. The vast majority of NHS services are performing extremely well under a great deal of pressure. His point about leadership is extremely important and one to which I have given a lot of thought. At the heart of the problem is that we do not have enough hospitals being run by doctors and nurses. Around 56% of our managers have a clinical background, compared with 76% in Canada and 96% in Sweden. To put it bluntly, doctors like to be given instructions by other doctors. Exceptional people from a non-clinical background can do it, but it is hard because doctors have many years of training and are highly experienced people. I have put in place measures to try to make it easier for more clinicians to become our managers of the future.

**Mr Speaker:** In wishing the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree all the best in the period ahead, I call Luciana Berger.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): In her speech today, the Prime Minister made a number of hard-hitting observations. She said:

“there is no escaping the fact that people with mental health problems are still not treated the same as if they have a physical ailment”.

She reported on the increase in self-harm among young people, and she told us about the shocking reality that, on average, 13 people take their life every single day in England. Given that the Conservative party has been in government for almost seven years, and that the Secretary of State has been Health Secretary for almost four of those years, who does he think is responsible for the terrible failures highlighted by the Prime Minister today?

**Mr Hunt:** I just think that is a totally inappropriate question—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order.

**Mr Hunt:** With great respect to the hon. Lady—she campaigns tirelessly on mental health, and she deserves great credit for that—that is the same as saying that the last Labour Government should have sorted out every single problem in mental health by 2010, and I am not standing here saying that. The truth is that we have made good progress; if she thinks that it is trivial that we are treating 1,400 more people every day for mental health conditions, she should go and talk to some of her own constituents who are getting access to mental

health provision, who would not have been getting that access under the policies of the last Labour Government. We have made big strides in our mental health provision, but there is much more to do, and we are determined to do what it takes.

**Sir Alan Haselhurst** (Saffron Walden) (Con): Recognising that the supply of extra resources for the NHS will be a vital and continuing issue, is my right hon. Friend not exactly right when he says that equal attention has to be given to controlling demand so that people do not simply instinctively make calls on GPs' surgeries and A&E departments, which doctors themselves believe are avoidable and which could be dealt with in other ways?

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. Friend speaks extremely wisely. At the heart of it, we have a good commitment—the four-hour commitment, which was introduced by a Labour Government. I think it is one of the best things the NHS does: the promise that if someone is ill and needs urgent help, we will do something about it and get them under proper medical care within four hours. However, if we have the situation that NHS England now describes, where up to 30% of the people in A&E departments do not actually need to be there, we risk not being able to deliver that promise for the people who really do need it. That is why looking at how we can control demand from the people who do not need to be in A&Es, such as through the significant increase in investment in general practice and other measures, is going to be vital if we are going to crack this.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): The Secretary of State seems to be blaming the public for overwhelming A&E departments, when he well knows that the reason they go to A&E is that they cannot get to see their GP and social care is in crisis. Will he confirm that he has just announced another significant watering-down of the four-hour A&E target, following the watering-down by the coalition in their first year in office back in 2010? What is he personally doing to address the chronic long-term underperformance of hospitals, such as that at Worcester, where two people died on trolleys, and Plymouth, which is one of the hospitals that had to call in the Red Cross over the Christmas period?

**Mr Hunt:** I think—probably because of the forum we are in now—the right hon. Gentleman is misinterpreting what I have said, and it needs to be put right. Far from watering down the four-hour target, I have today recommitted the Government to that four-hour target. In just the answer before he spoke—maybe he was not listening—I actually said I thought it was one of the best things about the NHS that we have this four-hour promise. But the public will go to the place where it is easiest to get in front of a doctor quickly, and if we do not recognise that there is an issue with the fact that a number of people who do not need to go to A&Es are using them, and we do not try to address that problem, we will not make A&Es better for his constituents and mine. If he asks what we are doing to turn around hospitals in difficulty, we have introduced the new Care Quality Commission inspection regime and a chief inspector of hospitals—the most rigorous inspection regime in the world, which the Labour party tried to vote down.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement and the Secretary of State's confirmation of extra support for mental health. I particularly welcome the review to be led by Lord Stevenson and Paul Farmer. As they carry out that review on improving businesses' ability to support people with mental health problems, will they particularly look at how we can help smaller businesses—those that perhaps do not have the human resource expertise that larger businesses may have—to make sure that people with mental health problems stay in work and are able to get back into work when they fall out of it? They are the biggest single category of disabled people not currently working, and we could make a huge difference.

**Mr Hunt:** My right hon. Friend will of course know that from his distinguished time as a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions. He is right. The central problem we are trying to address is that if someone, for example, stops going to work and is signed off work because of severe depression, that is bad for the individual and also bad for the business. Too often, what happens at the moment is that it then becomes entirely the NHS's responsibility to get that person back to work; the business says, "Well, it's not our responsibility anymore because they're not turning up." With a little bit of help from the business, we could get the person back to work much more quickly, meaning that they recovered more quickly and the business would not lose someone important. That is what Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer will be looking into.

**Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): We will never solve the challenges facing the NHS and social care until there is a long-term settlement for funding both. Does the Secretary of State understand that the social care precept is completely inadequate to fill the gap and will increase inequality, because the areas that most need publicly funded care will be least able to raise that money? Will he speak to the Chancellor and the Communities and Local Government Secretary to look again at this issue and get the funding that social care desperately needs?

**Mr Hunt:** I agree with the hon. Lady that there are serious funding pressures in social care. We need a long-term solution to this, and we are doing important work on that. The precept is part of the solution. The local government settlement has been adjusted to take account of the different spending powers, or revenue-raising powers, of wealthier counties and wealthier local authority areas compared with other areas. We have to take into account the equality issue, and she is absolutely right to do that. However, if she is saying, "Have we solved the whole problem?", the answer is no—there is more work to do.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): I welcome the statement by my right hon. Friend. May I pay huge tribute to everybody working at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, especially in A&E, and especially over the nine days between Christmas and 2 January? Admissions almost doubled. At one point in the Queen's medical centre A&E department there were 180 people seeking treatment—that is a record. There were 395 more admissions than discharges in that nine-day period. I pay huge tribute to everybody who is working in our

NHS. Can my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that he will continue to work with our hospital trusts, like NUHT, as they bring forward plans to change schemes—it is not just simply about money—and do everything that he can to support them in these unprecedented times?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to do that. I echo my right hon. Friend's praise for the staff at NUHT, which was particularly pressured over Christmas. They have made particular efforts to improve patient safety and quality of care over recent years. She is absolutely right, and of course I will continue to work closely with her trust and others.

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson** (Coventry North West) (Lab): At 9.30 am today I received an email from a constituent in Coventry who asked me to bring it to the Secretary of State's attention; I am delighted to do so. She writes as follows:

"I am a nurse with 26 years' experience who has always worked full time and has paid my tax and national insurance without ever having to burden the government, social services or the NHS in my lifetime but have gladly served and given 100%"

to it. She continues:

"Unfortunately, my 18 year old daughter has recently become unwell mentally and attempted suicide twice in a 3 week period... I am really sad to say—

this comes from a nurse of 23 years' experience—

"that the care she has been given has been dreadful. I am somebody who works in the NHS so I understand the strains the service is under but I also expect that as a family who give so much to society that when it is our time of need that we can expect a service that meets our needs."

I ask the Secretary of State whether he will kindly agree to meet Mrs Hardy and me—Sarah Hardy is the lady's name—or arrange for her to meet somebody who can give her some sort of reassurance. She continues that she has been waiting six months without any mental health assessment or support from the NHS—six months for a daughter of 18 years of age. Will he agree to do that so that it is not just a case of more hollow words?

**Mr Hunt:** I am more than happy to meet Mrs Hardy, but ahead of that I would like to look at the particular issue of why she has had to wait for so long. The hon. Gentleman put it very eloquently, and she put it very eloquently, and we owe a huge debt to such people. What she has described with her 19-year-old daughter's treatment is just not satisfactory: it is not good enough. That is why the Prime Minister talked this morning about the injustice of having to wait so long for treatment, and that is exactly what we are trying to put right.

**Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): The House of Commons Library has calculated that the real-terms increase in health-related spending between 2010 and 2016 was 9.4% in England, yet it was zero in Wales. Not only are A&E waiting times consistently longer in Wales than in England, but waiting times for routine procedures can be as much as two and a half times longer in Wales. I regularly see constituents in tears who are waiting well in excess of a year for hip operations. Does the Secretary of State agree that the Labour party must start to acknowledge the challenges facing the NHS in Wales and accept responsibility for them? [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Hunt:** I think my hon. Friend's constituents in Wales would be appalled by the reaction we have just had. Labour Members stand on their high horse in complaining about NHS care in England, but when he brings up poor NHS care in Wales, they tut and make noises as though they do not want to hear about it. If they care about NHS patients, they should care about them throughout the whole of the United Kingdom. I am afraid that that just shows the party political agenda. Yes, my hon. Friend is right: NHS care in Wales is worse, and Labour needs to do something about it.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I have been contacted by several constituents who have spent 14 hours in A&E waiting for a bed. As well as by social care cuts, we have been hampered by a shortage of A&E doctors. The Department of Health was warned that that would become a growing problem over five years ago, and the Health Committee warned about it again last year. When will this shortage of A&E doctors be ended by the Government—by the summer, by next year, by the following year? The Secretary of State has had seven years. When will he deal with the shortage of A&E doctors?

**Mr Hunt:** Let me tell the right hon. Lady what we have done about A&E doctors. Their number has gone up by 1,200 since 2010, which is an increase of over 50%. The number of A&E consultants has gone up by 500, which is an increase of over 20%. At the same time, we have recruited 2,000 more paramedics. As a result of those changes, our emergency departments are seeing—within the four-hour target—2,500 more people every single day compared with 2010. That is not to minimise the pressures in the NHS we have had over the winter or to say that there is not more that needs to be done, which is why I outlined a number of things in my statement.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): The Secretary of State kindly came to see the plans for the emergency room at Worthing hospital and came back six years later to see how it is working and to admire it in operation. I hope that the next time he comes he can look at the Zachary Merton community hospital and the Swandean mental health services as well.

On child mental health care, may I put it to him that a quarter of the 700,000 teenagers going through each stage each year will have bumps and need resilience, and that their parents and teachers need help? Will he make sure that the Green Paper covers advice to parents and teachers so that they know what is in the normal range of behaviours and what is outside that range?

**Mr Hunt:** I commend my hon. Friend for his one-man campaign, which I continue to admire on many occasions, against the misinformation put out by 38 Degrees. I thank the staff at Worthing hospital for their fantastic work over the busy Christmas period. As usual, he puts his finger on a very important issue, which is that as we seek to raise the profile of mental health treatment for children and young people, we must not medicalise every single moment of stress. For example, worries before exams are not cause to talk to an NHS psychiatrist. A lot of work on the Green Paper will be looking at how we can promote self-help and at how we can help schools to support people through difficult patches, but we will also look at how we can make sure people get NHS care quickly when it is needed.

**Dr Rosena Allin-Khan** (Tooting) (Lab): It is great to see the Secretary of State here today in the Chamber after enjoying his Christmas recess. While he was away staff on the NHS frontline had to work double shifts, the London ambulance service computer system crashed and we found out that the Red Cross needed to be drafted into our hospitals. Will the Secretary of State tell us which hospitals he visited during the Christmas recess?

**Mr Hunt:** I was in touch with what was happening in the NHS every single day throughout the Christmas recess. As someone who has worked in a hospital, the hon. Lady might question whether it is particularly helpful for NHS hospitals to have visits by high-profile politicians right at their busiest periods. I have been very closely in touch. She talks about the problem at London ambulance service. That was a problem staff have been trained to deal with. The staff of her own hospital worked extremely well, but they do not welcome attempts—she is making one this afternoon—to politicise the problems the NHS faces.

**Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): On the changes to the four-hour standard that the Secretary of State heralded, what can be done to incentivise and upskill GPs who may wish to take a closer interest in minor and moderate illnesses, including the use of nurse-led minor injury units?

**Mr Hunt:** They have a very important role. Some of the most successful and best-performing trusts, such as Luton and Dunstable, have a very good streaming process at the A&E front door, with good alternatives when it is not appropriate for people to go to an A&E department. We need to learn from that. Nurse-led units can be very important. GP-led units can make a big difference, too. It will not be the same everywhere, for reasons of space if nothing else, but there is a solution that everywhere can adopt.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): In the past few weeks, we have seen pressures in the NHS that, to a certain extent, the Secretary of State has acknowledged. Given that we are not yet in the midst of a very desperate cold spell, and given that we are not in the throes of a flu epidemic, how can he come here today and complacently suggest he has a grip on our NHS services? Why was he not on top of those trusts he knew were weak? He knew they would be under threat if there was any pressure. What is he going to do when we hit a cold snap and people are suffering from flu in large numbers?

**Mr Hunt:** I am afraid that I reject that suggestion. The right hon. Lady wants to know what we have been doing over the course of the year. As I said in the statement, we have 1,600 more doctors than we had just a year ago, over 3,000 more nurses, the biggest flu vaccination programme in our history and 12,000 additional GP sessions booked over the festive period. A huge amount of work has been done, with a particular focus on distressed areas. Many of those distressed areas coped extremely well—not all of them, which is why there is more work to do.

**David Tredinnick** (Bosworth) (Con): When the Health Committee in the previous Parliament looked at children and adolescent mental health services, one of the main

[David Tredinnick]

concerns was the distance travelled by patients—sometimes halfway across the country—to get treatment. Will the Secretary of State expand on his plans to reduce attendance at A&E? Does he envisage a new form of gatekeeper and does he intend to try to keep drunks out of A&E?

**Mr Hunt:** I would probably use the word “streaming”, rather than gatekeeper, to ensure that we have good, alternative offers for people who do not need to be in A&E. Frankly, it is not safe for an A&E department to have people there for six, seven or eight hours with a minor injury and no urgent health need. It is distracting for staff and can make it more difficult for them to deal with people who have more immediate needs.

On distances travelled, as the Prime Minister said this morning it is completely unacceptable for people to have to go 400 miles for a mental health bed. What is the solution? We are commissioning more beds, but the actual solution is to intervene earlier so that people do not get to that stage in treatment where they need in-patient care. We know that if we intervene earlier we can in many cases head off that need and help people to get better more quickly.

**Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): This afternoon, patients at Nottingham’s Queen’s Medical Centre emergency department are waiting on average for more than four hours. In the last month for which figures are available, 3,500 people had to wait for more than four hours in the emergency department. We cannot go on like this, so will the Secretary of State agree to fast-track the capital we need to increase capacity at Nottingham’s emergency department?

**Mr Hunt:** I will happily take a look at that. Obviously, when it comes to the allocation of capital, we prioritise any projects that will help us to improve the situation in A&E departments and reduce the stresses.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Secretary of State has acknowledged that there is a shortage of acute mental health beds. That arises from the decision by many health trusts to close beds in favour of putting resources into services in the community. One effect is that people approaching a mental health crisis find it harder to know where to turn for help. Will he explain more about the crisis provision in which we are investing the extra £15 million? Is there a common way of knowing how one can easily access those vital services?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to supply more details. The £15 million is for places of safety—it is very specifically focused on support for the police service so that we can ensure that we live up to our legal commitment from this year not to send young people into police cells when they actually need mental health support.

More broadly, my right hon. Friend is right that there is a policy change—most people think it is the right thing—to treat more people in the community where we can. What is not working is the system that divides people up into four tiers, which means that we sometimes say to people, “We can’t treat you because you are tier 3.” People get sent away, which is not acceptable. That is why we are producing a Green Paper. We want to look at a better way forward.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): Does the Secretary of State accept that the deepening crisis in the NHS is not solely down to an ageing society, and that failure to provide sufficient funding is the key to the crisis, and therefore that it is possible to address it? What will he do about it?

**Mr Hunt:** If the hon. Lady is worried about funding, she might explain why funding for the NHS in England went up by double the rate of funding for the NHS in Scotland over the last Parliament—[*Interruption.*] I will get her the figures on Northern Ireland, but I say that by way of reference. I apologise for my error.

I agree with the hon. Lady that it is not just about the ageing society; it is about changing consumer expectations and the fact that people want access to healthcare 24/7 today in a way that was not the case 10 or 20 years ago. That in itself is the cause of a lot of the additional pressure.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome today’s announcement on mental health. It is absolutely clear that the Government are serious about improving mental health treatment and prevention. The challenge is to translate ambitions into action. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will put in place mechanisms to ensure that the proposals and those in the five-year forward view for mental health become reality? Specifically, will he look at ensuring that no sustainability and transformation plan is signed off without clear plans and funding for improving mental healthcare?

**Mr Hunt:** I can assure my hon. Friend that that is happening. Indeed, one of the key metrics by which we will judge STPs is their progress on delivering our mental health targets. She is absolutely right to say that ambitions need to turn into action, but she will find that, because of the comments that she and many other hon. Members have made over the past few years, there is much more understanding in the NHS that mental healthcare is a big priority, and more understanding that we need to stop resources constantly being sucked into the acute sector, as has happened over many years.

**Michael Dugher** (Barnsley East) (Lab): The Secretary of State recently announced that the Government were pressing ahead with significant cuts to the community pharmacy budget in the Department of Health in the face of huge opposition from Members on both sides of the House, members of the public and healthcare professionals. Given the evidence that one in five people who would usually see a pharmacist for medical advice say that they will make a GP appointment if their local pharmacist is closed—in areas of higher deprivation such as mine, it is four in five—and with the risk that many of those people in desperation will turn up at the local hospital, are the Government in danger of making an appalling crisis in the NHS even worse?

**Mr Hunt:** As with all parts of the NHS, we have to ask the pharmacy sector to make efficiency savings. Some 40% of pharmacies are clustered in groups of three or more, and it does not make sense for the NHS to continue to subsidise pharmacies that are very close to other pharmacies. Our reforms are designed to ensure, however, that where there is only one local pharmacy that people can access, that pharmacy is protected.

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge the damaging effect that loneliness can have on mental health, and will he join me in welcoming the launch of the Jo Cox loneliness commission at the end of this month?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to do that and to acknowledge the importance of this issue. The latest figures I have seen are that 5 million older people say that their main form of company is the television, which is not acceptable, and we all have a responsibility to do better. It is not just a moral but a practical issue, as loneliness makes people more likely to need hospital treatment, which is of course expensive and challenging for the NHS.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): The Secretary of State has talked a great deal about preventing people from needing to go to A&E by intervening much earlier, yet surely he must recognise that the cuts to local authorities and social care make it much more likely that people will not be picked up earlier in the progress of an illness but will have to resort to the health service in a much more difficult situation. Can he not now have a discussion with his ministerial colleagues, particularly the Chancellor, and tell them that they have got this wrong and that we have to invest in preventive services? That means more funding for local authorities, rather than the 57% cut my authority has had, and investing now in proper social care, not the £5 billion of cuts in social care since 2010, otherwise the pressure on our NHS will just continue.

**Mr Hunt:** I actually agree with the hon. Lady's broad point about the importance of the social care system and its interconnectedness with the NHS. As she well knows—her party's manifesto reflected this as well—in 2010 we faced a very challenging economic situation, and both parties recognised the need for cuts in public spending. What changed in 2015, however, at least in the Conservative party's manifesto, was the recognition that we needed to increase funding for the social care system, and with the changes announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in December, all local authorities can now increase funding for social care in real terms. I hope that we can start to turn things around.

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): With the recent Education Committee report on children in care in mind, I welcome the Prime Minister's refocus on mental health and the Secretary of State's continued support for action. What practical steps does he have in mind, given our finding that local integration, effective relationships and the teaching of personal, social and health and economic education all help to produce good outcomes?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right—obviously his role on the Select Committee gives him a particular insight—but we do not want to rush to a solution, which is why we have said that we will produce a Green Paper before the end of the year. It is a complex area. Other hon. Members have alluded to the risk of medicalising problems, given that, as we know, all young people at school experience periods of stress, anxiety and worry that are not necessarily diagnosable mental health conditions and which we would not want to

make out to be such. This is about thinking through a smart way to improve resilience training and self-help and to educate schools so that they can spot when something is just a temporary thing in the run-up to exams, or whatever, and when it could be something a lot more serious, such as obsessive compulsive disorder, an eating disorder or something else that needs more immediate help. We have today started a big education programme with schools, but we want to go further.

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): I welcome the extra investment, if that is what it turns out to be, in mental health, but I want to press the Secretary of State on the question asked from the Dispatch Box by my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester South (Jonathan Ashworth) about educational psychology and how it will work. I speak as a mother of a child with SEN issues who has relied on clinical and educational psychology in schools. The school that my children currently attend is increasing class sizes from 30 to 33 and reducing the teaching staff—specifically those who engage with SEN children—because of changes to education funding. How does the Secretary of State think that will affect the mental health of pupils in my children's school?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady raises a very important issue. Like her, I have had constituents who found it difficult to access educational psychologists and they have not been able to get approval for the plan that they need. We will consider these issues in the build-up to the Green Paper, and I encourage the hon. Lady to participate in that process.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): Will the Health Secretary please get the message out there loud and clear to health bosses up and down the country that we need more capacity in our A&Es, so that when my CCG goes to NHS England with a request for £285 million for its appalling plan to downgrade my local A&E, bulldoze Huddersfield royal infirmary and replace it with a small planned care unit with fewer beds, it will realise that that money would be better spent on frontline A&E care in one of the country's biggest towns.

**Mr Hunt:** I take seriously, of course, everything my hon. Friend says. I will say that the NHS does not always get these things right. I led a campaign against an A&E closure in my constituency when I was a Back Bencher—[*Interruption*—]and the Labour party was in power and about to take a wholly mistaken decision, which I was luckily able to persuade the Government not to take in the interests of my constituents. We will look carefully into these issues. On the broader point that my hon. Friend makes, we have to understand across the NHS that capacity matters, but in the long run, we will not solve the problem solely by increasing capacity in A&Es for ever. We need alternative forms of provision. Demand is growing, so we need to find different ways to offer treatment to people who do not need to be in an A&E. That is what we are exploring.

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): I declare an interest in that my husband is an A&E consultant. If the Secretary of State were to speak to him, he would be told that, as we have already heard, the extra pressures on A&E are the result of the almost disappearance of preventive care, social care and

[Lucy Powell]

other services. The problem is not individuals arriving in A&E who should not be there; it is other services that are referring people to A&E when they should not. Will the Secretary of State take responsibility for his Government's decisions over the past six years that have now turned out to have been a false economy, because cutting all these vital services back to the bone is what is putting A&E on the brink of breakdown?

**Mr Hunt:** I agree with the broader principle that preventive care is vital, but with respect, I disagree with the suggestion that services have been cut to the bone. We have 1,600 more GPs—an increase of 5%—and the NHS was protected in the last Parliament. We recognise that there are problems in the social care system, which we are now in the process of putting right. Both at the last election, when the hon. Lady put a lot of input into Labour's policies, and the one before it, the party promising the most resources for the NHS was the Conservative party, not the Labour party.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Everyone knows that the Secretary of State has an impossible job, which he does with humanity and energy. One part of his impossible job relates to the two-tier system, whereby much depends on where people live. In rural north Lincolnshire, people can wait more than three weeks to see a doctor and can wait two hours for an ambulance to come—[*Interruption.*] Yes, people have waited two hours, lying in the street, in places such as Market Rasen, while they wait for an ambulance. That is not acceptable, and it can be even worse on occasions. This comes on top of long-term lack of investment, which means we lack a psychiatric unit at the Peter Hodgkinson centre in Lincoln. I wonder whether we now need to start an honest discussion with the people about how we are going to devote more resources to health in this country. It could be through social insurance models or even—God forbid, and I know people will not agree with this—charging people who do not turn up for appointments.

**Mr Hunt:** While I do not agree with moving to a social insurance model, I have some sympathy with what my hon. Friend has said about the broader issue of resourcing healthcare. If there are to be a million more over-65s in the next five years, we shall have to find a way to continue to invest more in our health and social care systems over the decades ahead. We are doing that this year in providing an extra £3.8 billion, and Governments will need to continue to do it in the coming decades.

My hon. Friend has rightly highlighted a specific problem. I do not have a solution to it now, but I want him to know that I understand that, in rural areas, people can wait too long for ambulances. Our system of targets gives ambulance services an incentive to prioritise the calls to which they can respond quickly in nearby towns, but I shall look into the issue.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): The Secretary of State tells us that he has a plan and a strategy, so I assume that he is on top of all the facts, but will he assure us that he understands the scale of the problem by answering this question? As of the latest count this week, how many hospital beds were being blocked by people who could not be discharged because no facilities for their care were available in the community?

**Mr Hunt:** I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the figures.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): More than a third of A&E attendances at peak times are caused by drunkenness. Behaviour on such a scale is as unacceptable as it is irresponsible. What more can be done to reduce that proportion hugely by this time next year?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend has raised an issue of public accountability. These are our national health services, and we need to treat them in a responsible way. It is selfish to behave irresponsibly and impose pressure on an A&E department, because someone else who needs help may not be able to get it.

**Mr Ivan Lewis** (Bury South) (Lab): First, may I ask whether the Secretary of State is accusing the Red Cross of weaponising the national health service? Secondly, let me point out that when the NHS makes cuts, the services that suffer time and again are the so-called Cinderella services: mental health services. The only way to prevent that is to ring-fence the funds and force local commissioners to demonstrate to local populations that the extra money is genuinely being spent on improving mental health services. Finally, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), when local authority services are cut to the bone, they can only provide statutory services and all the preventive services go—never mind the cuts in social care. What is preventing the Secretary of State from commissioning an all-party group to seek a sustainable, long-term funding model for social care?

**Mr Hunt:** The Prime Minister has said that we need to find a long-term solution to the problem of funding social care, and that work is ongoing. We recognise the urgency of the situation.

As for the evidence of whether mental health services are reaching the frontline, we need to establish whether more money is being spent on mental health provision than in previous years, and, as I said earlier, about £1 billion more is being spent than two years ago.

**Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): As my right hon. Friend has mentioned, the A&E departments at the Worcestershire royal hospital and the Alexandra hospital in Redditch have been under huge pressure over the past few weeks. Can he reassure patients at both our hospitals that everything possible is being done to alleviate the problem? While I am grateful for the measures that have been introduced, what our trust really needs is agreement on a £29 million bid to increase capacity, and I urge my right hon. Friend to consider that as a matter of urgency.

**Mr Hunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for her interest—on behalf of her constituents—in what has been happening. Subject to staffing, a new ward will be opened at the trust next week, and a new chief executive will arrive in the spring. We recognise the need for capital spending to increase capacity at both the Alex and the royal, and we will consider that bid sympathetically.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): The Secretary of State could not resist making his customary political attack on the Welsh NHS. This weekend, I had cause to visit my local hospital A&E department with a family member, and we received a brilliant, speedy and expert service. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the staff at the Royal Glamorgan hospital? Will he also congratulate the Welsh Labour Government on not having to call the Red Cross to any hospital in Wales, and will he further congratulate them on their long-standing emphasis on mental health? Wales spends more on mental health provision per capita than England or, indeed, any part of the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the £2 billion that he has cut from the Welsh budget in the past six years.

**Mr Hunt:** In the hon. Gentleman's long list of statistics, what he was not prepared to say is that people wait twice as long for a hip replacement in Wales, more than double the proportion of the population is on a waiting list for NHS care—that is one in seven people in Wales, compared with one in 15 in England—and those in Wales are 40 times more likely than those in England to be waiting too long for a diagnostic test result.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Torbay, like many other places, has been under pressure owing to the demographics of an ageing population in the bay area, but does the Secretary of State agree that it is encouraging to hear of work being done in places such as the Chelston Hall practice, which I visited on Friday, to make sure doctors can be available on the day for those who need them and people are sent on to specialists who can help them better, such as a physiotherapist, rather than just taking up vital GP appointments?

**Mr Hunt:** Yes, indeed, and I congratulate all the NHS and social care staff in Torbay on doing a fantastic job. I also congratulate them on the pioneering work they have done on health and social care integration, which has made a huge difference to my hon. Friend's constituents.

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): Over the new year, East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust saw life-threatening calls up 42% on last year, and the chair of Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust described its emergency department as pushed to the limit, with, as the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said, almost double the normal number of hospital admissions, so clearly these were necessary attendances, but surely many of them could have been prevented. The Secretary of State has already acknowledged the connection between inadequate social care and this entirely foreseeable crisis, so I ask again: will he commit his Government to fund this properly?

**Mr Hunt:** I find these questions about funding curious coming from members of the Labour party, as, had we followed its plans, we would be spending £1.3 billion less on the NHS this year than what the NHS is actually getting, and I just say to them that the reason why we are able to spend that extra money on the NHS is that we know how to run the economy.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): All too often, mental health patients have wondered whether this issue has enough leadership, and I am incredibly pleased that the

Prime Minister made one of her earlier speeches on this issue, but while no one in this House would oppose an extra £1.4 billion being invested over the course of this Parliament, may I echo the words of the chief executive of Mind that the proof will be in the impact this investment has on patients' day-to-day experiences? So will the Secretary of State ask the relevant Minister to meet me to discuss plans to build a new psychiatric and dementia care unit at Bath, to service the whole of the south-west?

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy, on my hon. Friend's behalf, to ask the Minister responsible to meet him to discuss that psychiatric unit. Of course the proof of the pudding is in the eating, but this is the first time that I can remember that a Prime Minister has made her first major speech on the NHS about mental health and indeed talked, on the steps of Downing Street as she arrived, about the importance of sorting out mental health. That is a sign of the commitment coming right from the top.

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): The fabulous team at Imperial, St Mary's in west London are featuring in a television programme this week, and the chief of service for emergency care is reported as saying:

"We've just had our worst 10 days on record. There's nowhere in the hospital to move anybody. What's happened in the last two years is the whole system, countrywide, has ground to a halt."

That is partly because there is more than the equivalent of a ward of patients at any time who cannot move out of the hospital because there is nowhere for them to go. Does the Secretary of State accept that his Government have gone too far in the destruction of local government finance, including for social care, and does he accept that next year, despite all the rhetoric, local government finance will go down, not up?

**Mr Hunt:** First, I would like to thank the staff at Imperial, who, alongside other NHS staff, have done a fantastic job over a very difficult period. I would say to the hon. Lady that 50% of councils have no delayed discharges of care. It is a problem in many hospitals, but there are many areas that are managing to deal with it. I suggest that the local authorities that serve her constituency should look at the other parts of the country that are dealing with this problem.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): I welcome the provision of mental health facilities and services for schools, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that the type of first aid that he is proposing will also be made available to MPs and their staff, given the number of people with mental health problems that we deal with during our surgeries?

**Mr Hunt:** That is an absolutely excellent suggestion, and I will be very happy to take it up.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The problems in A&E that we have been hearing about this afternoon are symptomatic of problems elsewhere in the system. At Aintree hospital, whose staff are doing a fantastic job in very difficult circumstances, there are 130 patients who are medically fit for discharge today but social services are unable to support them to go home or to go into care elsewhere. The Secretary of State needs to accept that the cut of £4.6 billion to social services was

[Bill Esterson]

a mistake. He also needs to accept that the better care fund is simply not delivering. It involves money being recycled from elsewhere in the system. Let us look at the figures for Sefton, which was promised £9 million but has received less than £1 million. If he is serious about sorting out the problems in social care in the long term, he needs to get the funding right. He needs to reinstate all the cuts that have been made.

**Mr Hunt:** I accept that more funding needs to go into social care, and that is why we are putting an extra £3.5 billion per annum into social care by the end of the Parliament. Despite the very real pressures in social care, however, there are many local authority areas and hospitals that have no delayed discharges at all. Half of all delayed discharges are in just 20 local authorities. As we wait for that funding to come on stream—it is not all coming on stream at the start of the Parliament—there is lots that can be done.

**Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for paying tribute to frontline staff. I declare an interest as someone who worked in the NHS over the Christmas period and who saw at first hand some of the pressures that staff are facing, but I know from my 20 years' experience working as a nurse that these are winter pressures that are faced every year. On mental health, will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the mental health care nurses in Sussex and to Sussex police? Through their joint working, they have reduced the number of patients being placed in prison cells as a place of safety by 50%. That is a huge achievement in the county that contains Birling Gap and Beachy Head.

**Mr Hunt:** I welcome my hon. Friend's contribution as a practising nurse; it adds greatly to the House. I am more than happy to pay tribute to our brilliant mental health nurses. They have one of the most stressful jobs anyone can have, and I pay particular tribute to the ones in Sussex, which has those tragic suicide hotspots.

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab):** Given that the cold weather is coming, I want to return to the risk of a flu epidemic. A desperate doctor wrote to me last night to say:

"Sooner or later, there will be an epidemic and let me tell you: we cannot cope. Another shift, another full hospital. Another gridlocked A&E, more desperate but often implausibly understanding patients. Another 13 or 14 hour shift with one 10 or 15 minute break. Some patients and relatives get angry, some despair, most watch us and realise we can't physically do anything more."

Please help me, as her MP, to represent her, and please help us to have more staff.

**Mr Hunt:** That doctor speaks for many doctors who are working incredibly hard, particularly in our emergency departments. I would say to that doctor that we recognise the need for more doctors and we are recruiting more doctors, not just across the NHS but in emergency departments in particular. We also recognise that we need to find a different way to deal with some of the patients who come to the hospital front door, so that we can alleviate the pressure. That is what we are looking at.

**Robert Courts (Witney) (Con):** I recently visited Bridewell organic gardens, an award-winning charity in my constituency that improves the mental wellbeing of those suffering from a range of mental health conditions. I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement this morning raising awareness of the ongoing stigma regarding mental health, as well as the £1 billion investment and the commitment to improving services, but is the Secretary of State prepared to investigate schemes such as the one I mentioned to ensure that treatment of those suffering from mental health conditions is not simply limited to the provision of medication?

**Mr Hunt:** I am absolutely prepared to do that. We need to be open-minded about the fact that mental health, in some ways, is a relatively new field, and research on what works best is continuing to uncover many new things—much of that research is happening in this country. There has been a big move away from thinking that medication is always the best way forward. We have seen a huge expansion in talking therapies in the past few years in this country, and I am sure that trend will continue.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** Despite the best efforts of dedicated NHS staff, patients attending one of my local A&Es were told that they would routinely have to wait 11 hours just to be seen. People were routinely on hospital trolleys for up to 20 hours. Mental health patients were sent to Colchester because it had the nearest available in-patient beds for 17-year-olds. Somebody I know waited six hours for a 999 ambulance, despite calling 999 three times. We can do better than that. To that end, I implore the Secretary of State—in fact, I plead with him—to intervene and suspend the needless downgrades of Dewsbury and Huddersfield hospitals, which will cost lives.

**Mr Hunt:** None of those examples of poor care is remotely acceptable. On my watch and under this Government we will see no return to the bad old days when people were routinely waiting far too long. [Interruption.] We recognise the problems that we have just had, and we are absolutely determined to make sure that we sort them out. If the hon. Lady's local hospital reconfiguration ends up on my desk because it is referred by the local health scrutiny committee, I will look at the matter carefully and consider whether to refer it to the independent reconfiguration panel.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and the Prime Minister's focus on mental health, particularly the suicide prevention strategy and the £1 billion funding commitment to improving services. Mental health often not only affects the patient but affects their family and those closest and dearest to them—those who care for the patient. Does he agree that raising awareness and addressing the ongoing stigma of mental health is a vital part of our work on mental health?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to mention that. We can approach this area with some optimism about the potential for change. If she looks at our progress on dementia over the past four years, she will see that not a day goes past without something in the newspapers about dementia. The understanding of

dementia has changed dramatically. We can change attitudes, and we absolutely need to do so because the only way to get help to people in mental health crisis is if they talk about it openly. That is a vital thing to change.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I entirely agree with the comments about the pressures on GP services, preventive health and social care, but I particularly want to ask about mental health services for students. There were three suspected suicides in the first few weeks of term this year at Bristol University, and I know from speaking to Dr Dominique Thompson, who runs the student health services there, that the number of students presenting with mental health issues has grown exponentially over recent years. What can the Secretary of State say to reassure us that students leaving home for the first time to go to university will be in safe hands?

**Mr Hunt:** I had an interesting afternoon visiting the suicide prevention unit at Bristol Royal infirmary, where I had a good discussion about its pioneering work. I learned a great deal from that visit. We have a particular concern about the very significant growth in mental ill health among women aged 18 to 24. Today, the Prime Minister announced that we have updated the suicide prevention strategy to make sure that all parts of the country can learn from best practice, including places like Bristol.

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): I welcome today's announcement on mental health, where excellent work is being done, led by Paul Farmer of Mind. Often, the key challenge is to identify those who need help and support, so will the Secretary of State agree to meet the Department for Work and Pensions to look at ways in which we can help to signpost those identified through the personal independence payments process to the additional support and help available?

**Mr Hunt:** Let me reassure my hon. Friend that those meetings are already happening; we have a health and work Green Paper, and we are particularly trying to speed up access to mental health services for people on benefits whom we can help to be more independent if we address their mental health problem more quickly.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): I wish to pick up on a point the Secretary of State made about the right sort of patient arriving at A&E. Pat, a frail, elderly constituent of mine who had pneumonia-like symptoms, did not want to go to A&E and put pressure on hard-working staff, so she rang NHS Direct, only to be told there were 100 people in front of her for a doctor's visit. Of course she thought she was going to die if she was left in her house, so she went to A&E, where she waited 20 hours for a bed. As the Secretary of State knows, that is unacceptable, so does he agree that there is urgent and immediate demand for out-of-hours doctors? If so, what is he going to do about it?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is right to say that we need better alternatives to A&E for people such as her constituent. Sometimes those do not exist, but one thing we need to do is make sure that people who call 111 and need to speak to a clinician can do so quickly. One thing we have piloted successfully in other parts of

the country is better GP supervision of people in care homes, who are sometimes the most vulnerable patients. We are looking at all these things, but on the broad direction of travel she is right to say that we need to find a better way forward for people such as her constituent.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): In sparsely populated rural Lincolnshire, vital reforms of health and social care risk being undermined by the performance of East Midlands ambulance service. Our police and crime commissioner says that his officers are routinely acting, in effect, as ambulance drivers. I know the Secretary of State understands the problems we face in rural Lincolnshire, but does he agree that, as currently constituted, East Midlands ambulance service is not serving the rural parts of its area as well as its staff want to and as well as my constituents need it to?

**Mr Hunt:** As we discussed earlier when my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) spoke, there are places where the service that the ambulance service provides to rural areas is not as good as it should be, sometimes because of the perverse incentives relating to how the targets work. I have been nervous about changing the targets, because that can sometimes be taken as a signal to relax and I am absolutely determined that we should meet the current targets, but I did make a commitment to him that I would look into this issue and I will do so.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Last year, just 67% of category red 1 ambulance calls in Sheffield were answered within eight minutes. Last week, I met a constituent whose husband died while he waited for an ambulance for two hours and 40 minutes. Can the Secretary of State continue to stand at that Dispatch Box and say that there is no link between the underfunding of our NHS and these irresponsible and completely unacceptable response times?

**Mr Hunt:** First, of course what happened in that situation is totally unacceptable, but the hon. Lady makes a mistake to continually bring this back to funding, as it is also about demand pressures and models of care. Let me reassure her about the extra funding that has gone into ambulance services. We have about 200 more ambulances and about 2,000 more paramedics, and every day the ambulance service is doing about 3,400 more blue-light calls than it was six years ago. Significant investment has been made, but clearly more needs to happen.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): The number of mental health patients in police cells is, rightly, down by 80%. People have bravely come to my surgery to talk about when they and their families have been struggling with mental health provision for those between the ages of 18 and 24. I pay tribute to Solent Mind and Southern Health, which are doing their level best to deal with this issue. One issue directly affecting that age group is the tier system, and people not being "sick enough" and not being sure where they should be going. Will the Secretary of State please confirm that he will focus on recruiting specialists in this area, because it is not about funding in my local clinical commissioning group—it is about finding the people to help those in need?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is right on both counts. We need to look carefully at where the tier system is not working, and that should be part of our work on the Green Paper that the Prime Minister announced this morning. It is unacceptable for people to be told that they are not sick enough to get the care they urgently need. All the things we have announced and intend to announce to improve mental health will fail if we do not get the recruitment and training of new staff right. Along with the commitment we are making today to invest more in mental health must come some important strategic workforce planning, which I hope will benefit my hon. Friend's constituents.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State referred to temporary assistance being given to distressed trusts, but is there not a more fundamental ticking time bomb in the form of the sustainability and transformation plans? I draw his attention to the debate I led on 16 December on the north-east London plan, which envisages a deficit of £578 million by 2021 and says that on a "business as usual" case model, with normal-type reductions and savings, there will still be a £240 million gap. That will mean poorer services. There is no capital provision for the closure of the King George hospital A&E and its re-provisioning at Queen's hospital. Will he look into this matter urgently? There is going to be a massive crisis in my area unless urgent steps are taken to provide more resources.

**Mr Hunt:** I am happy to look into that issue. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the staff of both Queen's and King George hospital, who have not only done very well over the winter but have made great progress in turning around the trust, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is in special measures. We are hopeful that it might be able to come out of special measures at some stage this year under its new leadership, but that is obviously a decision for the CQC.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Kettering general hospital, which serves my constituency, has a significant problem with delayed discharges. Whatever the issues relating to money, perhaps the problem with social care is the model. Would it not be a good idea if the Opposition were to give a genuine commitment to try to work together to find a social care system for the future?

**Mr Hunt:** My hon. Friend is right to say that we need to have these discussions in a less politically charged way, because we need to find a solution that will survive changes of Government and be fit for the long term. We miss a trick when we say that the problem is primarily about funding. We have a huge variation in provision, and there are many local authorities where there are no delayed discharges of care, as we discussed earlier. What does not happen enough in the NHS and the social care system is people learning from best practice in other parts of the country. That is what we to change.

**Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has spoken a lot today about trying to avoid unnecessary admissions to A&E. Will he tell me why admissions to A&E on Teesside as a result of chronic malnutrition have trebled under the Conservative

Government? Does he think that is any reflection on their broader approach to public policy and tackling poverty in this country?

**Mr Hunt:** The way to deal with those kinds of terrible problems is to have a strong economy that allows us to support people through difficult periods in their life. We have one of the strongest economies—in fact, I think we will be the strongest economy in the G7 this year. That allows us to do things such as invest in our health and social care system. It is the Conservative party that can deliver that.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I have spoken before about the staggering rise in the number of patients presenting at A&E at Addenbrooke's in Cambridge, and the hospital confirmed to me this morning that it continues to see more than 300 people each day, with high levels of delayed transfers of care. The impact was brought home to me by a constituent, Ann, who told me that on Thursday last week the facilities were so overcrowded that an adjacent seminar room was pressed into use. Bloods were being taken in the room, and she was treated there behind a makeshift curtain, reclining on a standard chair. Those are awful conditions in which to be treated, and in which to have to work. The Secretary of State says that it is not about funding; if it is not, will he come to Cambridgeshire and sit down with his Conservative colleagues on the county council and tell them where they are going wrong?

**Mr Hunt:** I went to Addenbrooke's in the autumn and saw at first hand how hard the staff there are working. That is another trust that is in special measures, but it has made huge progress in trying to turn things around. I met several staff in the emergency department as well, and I pay tribute to them for their very hard work. I have never said that it is not about funding; what I say is that it is not just about funding. There is huge variation. In parts of the country, emergency departments avoid precisely the kind of overcrowding that the hon. Gentleman described at Addenbrooke's. Hospitals that do that very successfully include Luton and Dunstable. We need all hospitals to adopt what the best hospitals do.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I welcome the publication of the new suicide prevention strategy, and I welcome the fact that it includes self-harm. I am also grateful for the mention of the work of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, which I chair. Will the Secretary of State meet Dr Robert Colgate? He has set out a triaging system for mental health, which means that people do not have to wait six to nine months to see a consultant. With the support of frontline staff, they can get an immediate triage assessment and assistance for their condition. Will the Secretary of State meet urgently Dr Colgate, whose work is being peer reviewed by the University of Manchester, to look at how his system, which is being rolled out throughout England, can help us to tackle the problems we have?

**Mr Hunt:** I thank the hon. Lady for her work on the all-party group. I am more than happy to meet Dr Colgate. The purpose of the refreshed suicide prevention strategy is to try to ensure that we adopt best practice throughout the country. Some areas of the country are doing a very

good job in suicide prevention, particularly in co-opting the public so that they understand that they can make a difference, too, but I am happy to explore with the hon. Lady what more can be done.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Secretary of State rightly pays tribute to NHS staff, but the reality is that many of our NHS workers are now at breaking point. They continue to perform their work with care and compassion in spite of, rather than because of, any action taken by the Health Secretary. It is now time for him to act. What commitment will he give to investing properly in NHS staff, and to reversing the process of the deskilling, demoralisation and downgrading of NHS staff that he and his Government have presided over since 2010?

**Mr Hunt:** With respect to the hon. Lady, who I know cares passionately about the NHS and often asks me questions about it, we now have 11,400 more doctors and 11,200 more nurses in the NHS than in 2010. We protected the NHS budget in 2010, when her party wanted to cut it, and we promised £5.5 billion more for the NHS than her party was prepared to promise at the most recent election. Her characterisation of this Government as not being prepared to back NHS staff is utterly absurd.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister's focus on mental health today is welcome, but does the Secretary of State accept that we will achieve parity of esteem only if we are prepared to accept how far we currently are from it? It is not a recent problem: the lack of recognition for mental health dates back to the inception of the national health service and is driven by our culture and choices as a country, rather than by any particular Government. Nevertheless, does the Minister accept that even the measures set out today, each of which is welcome in and of itself, will only really provide a sticking plaster for the problem? As it stands, on current progress, we are looking at having to wait decades before we achieve parity of esteem for mental health conditions.

**Mr Hunt:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his interest in that issue. Sometimes, this is a challenging area. We legislated for parity of esteem, with cross-party support, in 2012. The danger is that such a concept can be nebulous, which is why we asked Paul Farmer, the chief executive of Mind, to look independently at what would be reasonable, fair and sensible progress towards parity of esteem by 2020. He said that he thought it would be a 10-year process, but that this was the right ambition for 2020. It was his report that the Prime Minister accepted this morning. We are making progress against benchmarks that independent people have looked at. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we will not get there by 2020, but we must make sure that we deliver on that commitment while he and I are both MPs.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Very seriously mentally ill people rely on support from a whole range of services, including—obviously—mental health services, but also housing, social services, sometimes the criminal justice system and, crucially, family support services. What is being done to ensure a whole-Government strategy to raise the standard of care, particularly for

very severely ill people who need protection from harm both to themselves and, sadly, sometimes to others in society?

**Mr Hunt:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. One example where that is particularly true is in addiction services. Highly vulnerable people whom we are trying to help kick a drugs habit may also have a housing problem, a debt problem or a work problem. Unless we solve those problems holistically, we are unlikely to be able to address the health problem that sits at the heart of those challenges. In essence, that is what the STP process is trying to address—I am talking about providing more joined-up integrated services. I am happy to have further discussions with her as to how we can make more progress in that area.

**Seema Malhotra** (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): In his statement, the Secretary of State promised a Green Paper on children and young people's mental health before the end of the year. That could be 11 and a half months away. One in four people have a mental health disorder, and the Government's own research says that young people are disproportionately affected. We have all heard stories—I certainly have in my constituency—of young people waiting more than a year for support, including those who have been victims of domestic violence. Schools and parents are picking up the pieces. Young people deserve better. Will he clarify the reasons for what appears to be quite a long delay and commit to bringing forward the Green Paper so that action can be taken more quickly and that this pressing issue is not kicked into the long grass?

**Mr Hunt:** May I reassure the hon. Lady that we will not be kicking the issue into the long grass? The Prime Minister has made a statement that we will have a Green Paper. There is a very specific reason why we need a bit of time: we want to ensure that the changes that we make—[*Interruption.*] We are getting a bit of chuntering from the Labour Front-Bench team. They might want to listen to the answer. The reason why we need to take some time is that a number of pilots concerning the improvement of mental health provision are taking place in schools at the moment, and we want to see them go through and evaluate them to inform what we do in the Green Paper. That will take a bit of time, but, at the end of it, we will get a better evidence base for the right way forward.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Young people in Sheffield have for some time now been telling me that they are waiting 25 weeks for an appointment with CAMHS after referral. Headteachers are telling me that they are digging into their budgets to buy in support for pupils in crisis, because they cannot access NHS services. Is it not deeply cynical for the Prime Minister to be raising hopes that we will be tackling the mental health crisis of our young people when the measures and the money that have been announced fall so desperately short of what we need?

**Mr Hunt:** It would be cynical if we raised hopes and had no intention of doing anything about the matter. What the Prime Minister said this morning in her speech was that this was the start of a process. She pointed to those problems and said that we will have a

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Green Paper to look at how we deal with them in detail, which does take some time. I hope that we will get to a position when we can deal with those problems. The hon. Gentleman is lucky to have Professor Tim Kendall working in Sheffield, as he is the NHS lead mental health psychiatrist and a specialist in homelessness, and he is helping us to shape the strategy.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State and to colleagues across the House.

## Points of Order

6.4 pm

**Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Have you been informed whether the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has any intention of making a statement to the House on the resignation of the Deputy First Minister and the implications for the Assembly?

**Mr Speaker:** The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that I have not received any indication of an impending statement by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on the matter to which he refers. I appreciate that it will of course be of great interest to many Members of the House. The fairest thing I can say is that we must await the development of events. I am conscious that there is a Westminster Hall debate tomorrow afternoon. The possibility of an oral statement by the Government must clearly exist.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Over the past number of weeks in Northern Ireland, we have witnessed continuing political instability, which has been characterised by a scandal of immense proportions in relation to the renewable heat incentive and the continuing failure of the First Minister to step aside while an investigation, which my party had called for, takes place. As a consequence, we see the Deputy First Minister resigning today, which means that the house of cards will fall. As a consequence of that, what other avenues are available to hon. Members to discuss this particular political instability and difficulty, which will probably result in further Assembly elections or new negotiations?

**Mr Speaker:** This is an extremely sensitive situation, and I do not want to say anything that adds to that sensitivity. Suffice it to say that the hon. Lady inquired as to what other avenues are open to ensure discussion of this matter. In using the word “other”, I assume that she is referring to other avenues beyond the possibility of a Government statement, which, of course, it would be for the Government to decide whether to make. She is well familiar with the mechanisms available for scrutiny of the Executive in this place. The fairest thing I can say is that I would be extremely surprised if this matter were not fully aired in the next few days in this Chamber. As Speaker, I would want to facilitate the House if that is what is desired. My senses are that it will be desired and that it will happen.

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Many will be alarmed by the recent reports of attempts by a foreign Government to “take down” Members of this House, including a senior Minister. Given the very serious implications of this matter, what measures will you take to investigate it, not least because one party to the discussions, according to the press coverage, was, or is, at least partially a paid employee of this House?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for notice of it. At this stage, in direct response to his inquiry, I am not aware of anything that has happened that is a matter for the Chair.

If it transpires that something has happened that is a matter for the Chair, I will of course consider what action to take. The matter of concern is serious—I do not dispute that for one moment—but it is important to be accurate in the use of terms and language. To the best of my knowledge and belief—I do not doubt the good intentions of the right hon. Gentleman—the individual to whom he has indirectly referred has not been an employee of this House. The individual concerned was an employee of a number of institutions and people. My understanding is that she has resigned from one full-time post and from another part-time post. The part-time post, which had caused her to work administratively with a Member of the House, has ended and the pass that was available to her is being returned. I think that is a pretty full answer to the right hon. Gentleman, which it is intended to be, and I hope that it is helpful, but I do not think that it would be helpful further to dwell on the matter now. I thank him for raising the matter, which is obviously of concern to him.

I do not want to invite trouble, but the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), who is a very senior Member of the House—I know that he would not take liberties—is looking at me in a state of great perturbation. If he really wants to raise a point of order, I am not going to stop him.

**Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con) *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Speaker:** He does not. What a remarkable display of self-restraint by the hon. Gentleman. It might catch on—you never know. I think that colleagues would probably say to me, “Good luck with that one.”

## Technical and Further Education Bill

*Consideration of Bill, as amended in the Public Bill Committee*

### New Clause 1

#### REPORT ON QUALITY OUTCOMES OF COMPLETED APPRENTICESHIPS

‘(1) The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education shall report on an annual basis to the Secretary of State on quality outcomes of completed apprenticeships.

(2) A report under subsection (1) shall include information on—

- (a) job outcomes of individuals who have completed an apprenticeship;
- (b) average annualised earnings of individuals one year after completing an apprenticeship;
- (c) numbers of individuals who have completed an apprenticeship who progress to higher stages of education;
- (d) satisfaction rates of individuals who complete an apprenticeship on the quality of that apprenticeship; and
- (e) satisfaction rates of employers who hire individuals who complete an apprenticeship with the outcome of that apprenticeship.

(3) The Secretary of State shall lay a copy of any report under subsection (1) before Parliament.’—(*Gordon Marsden.*)

*This new clause would require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament annually on specified quality outcomes of completed apprenticeships.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

6.11 pm

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—*Representative panels*—

‘(1) The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education shall establish—

- (a) a panel of persons undertaking approved English apprenticeships; and
- (b) a panel of persons undertaking study towards approved technical education qualifications.

(2) A panel under subsection (1)(a) shall be established by 1 April 2017 and shall advise the Board of the Institute on all matters concerning approved English apprenticeships.

(3) A panel under subsection (1)(b) shall be established by 1 April 2018 and shall advise the Board of the Institute on all matters concerning technical education qualifications.’

*This new clause would establish representative panels of apprentices and of learners in technical education who are not doing apprenticeships.*

New clause 4—*Careers education: duty to publish strategy*—

‘(1) The Secretary of State shall publish a strategy for the purposes of improving careers education for persons receiving education or training—

- (a) in the course of an approved English apprenticeship;
- (b) for the purposes of an approved technical education qualification; or
- (c) for the purposes of approved steps towards occupational competence.

(2) The strategy shall be laid before Parliament.

(3) The strategy shall specify provisions under which the Secretary of State will seek to—

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- (a) ensure that persons receiving education or training under subsection (1) receive information, advice and guidance relating to their future careers, and that such information, advice and guidance is delivered in a way which meets each person's needs and is impartial;
- (b) ensure that such information, advice and guidance may be taken into account by relevant authorities and partners to meet the needs of local or combined authority areas;
- (c) ensure parity of esteem between technical, further and higher education; and
- (d) monitor the outcomes of such information, advice and guidance for recipients.

(4) The provisions specified in subsection (3) shall have specific regard to particular needs of different groups of persons receiving education or training under subsection (1), including—

- (a) persons with special educational needs;
- (b) care leavers;
- (c) persons of different ethnicities;
- (d) carers, carers of children, or young carers, as defined by the Care Act 2014; and
- (e) persons who have other particular needs that may be determined by the Secretary of State.

(5) The strategy shall include guidance for the purposes of improving careers education, to which the following bodies shall have regard—

- (a) the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills;
- (b) the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education; and
- (c) the Office for Students.

(6) The Secretary of State shall by regulations designate relevant authorities and partners for the purposes of subsection (3)(b).

(7) The Secretary of State may by regulations designate—

- (a) further groups of persons under subsection (4)(e); and
- (b) further national authorities or bodies under subsection (5).

(8) Regulations made under this section—

- (a) shall be made by statutory instrument; and
- (b) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(9) For the purposes of this section, "careers education" means education about different careers and occupations and potential courses or qualifications to attain those careers and occupations.

*This new clause would establish a statutory requirement for the Government to produce a strategy on careers education, which shall be taken to be the "Careers Strategy".*

Amendment 4, in schedule 1, page 21, line 13, at end insert—

'(4) The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education in performing its functions must have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to, and participation in, education or training provided in a form specified in subsection (6).'

*This amendment would ensure that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education must have due regard for widening access and participation.*

Amendment 5, page 21, line 13, at end insert—

'(4) The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education in performing its functions must co-operate with the Apprenticeship Delivery Board on progression into, and delivery of, apprenticeships.'

*This amendment would ensure that the Institute has a duty to co-operate with the Apprenticeship Delivery Board.*

Amendment 6, page 21, line 13, at end insert—

'2A After section ZA2 (general duties) insert—

"ZA2A Expenditure by the Institute

In the discharge of its duties and functions under this Chapter, the Institute shall in any one year expend a sum no less than the sum projected to be raised under the Apprenticeship Levy in that year."

Amendment 7, page 22, line 2, after "to" insert "state-funded".

Amendment 8, page 22, line 23, at end insert—

'(1A) In making determinations under subsection (1)(a) on occupations relating to apprenticeships, the Institute shall attach particular importance to the needs of apprentices aged between 16 and 24.'

*This amendment would ensure the mapping of occupation groups has particular regard for people aged 16-24 taking apprenticeships.*

Amendment 9, page 23, line 2, at end insert—

'(2A) Outcomes under subsection (2)(b) shall include recognised technical qualifications.'

*This amendment would ensure that all apprenticeship standards include a recognised technical qualification.*

Amendment 10, page 28, line 6, leave out "course document" and insert

"standard or technical assessment design specification".

Amendment 11, page 28, line 9, leave out "another person" and insert "other persons".

Amendment 12, page 28, line 10, leave out "another person" and insert "other persons".

Amendment 13, page 28, line 12, leave out section A2IA(4).

Amendment 14, page 28, line 17, after "education" insert "route".

Amendment 15, page 28, line 28, after "education" insert "route".

Amendment 17, page 28, line 30, leave out section A3A(2)(c).

Amendment 16, page 28, line 32, after "education" insert "route".

Amendment 18, page 28, line 39, after "Ofsted" insert ", the QAA".

Amendment 19, page 29, line 1, after "Ofsted" insert ", the QAA".

Amendment 20, page 29, line 3, after "England," insert

"including those offered by Higher Education Institutions".

Amendment 21, page 29, line 13, at end insert—

"QAA" means the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education.'

*Amendments 18, 19, 20 and 21 would ensure that the QAA would be included in the list of organisations required to share information and that degree apprenticeships were fully covered by this requirement.*

**Gordon Marsden:** Mr Speaker, may I, on behalf of everybody in the Chamber, wish you, the Deputy Speakers—one of them is taking your place as I speak—and all your officials a very happy new year, and the same to all Members of the House?

The issue we are pursuing this evening is whether this will be a happier new year for apprentices and the new Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. The Government will know that the Opposition have been broadly supportive of the process that they are bringing forward, although it was somewhat forced

upon them when their original mechanism, which was to get many of these things through in the academies Bill, was shipwrecked—the academies Bill mark 2 proved to be no more popular with some of their Back Benchers than the academies Bill mark 1. We therefore got a fairly rapid notice of the Technical and Further Education Bill before Christmas.

Having said that, we had a good Committee stage and I want to pay tribute to the Minister for his conviviality and the constructive way in which he responded to us. Of course, as the old saying goes, fine words butter no parsnips, but I hope that by the end of this evening we will have at least a few parsnips buttered.

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): A whole meal.

**Gordon Marsden:** Possibly a full meal, for those of a vegetarian instinct.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I, and indeed other Members, tabled a number of amendments in Committee that the Government do not appear to have taken on board. They were not pressed at the time, but we had hoped that the Government would bring some of them forward as their own amendments. Is he somewhat disappointed by that?

**Gordon Marsden:** I am always slightly disappointed when intimations of progress in Committee are not met with specifics on Report. Of course, the Government have the opportunity this evening, in commenting on our amendments, to do something about it, and indeed to accept some of them in principle. If they think that the amendments are defective but the basic principle is fine, they should take them on board.

6.15 pm

Let me turn to the raft of amendments that we have tabled. We moved new clause 1 in Committee and I think that it remains valid. It would require the Secretary of State to present to Parliament an annual report on the quality outcomes of completed apprenticeships. We have had many discussions and arguments in this place about the issue of apprenticeships, and much emphasis has been put on apprenticeship starts, but far less emphasis—this is not a party political point—has been put on the process of completion. Those who are familiar with Sir Francis Drake's famous saying that

“it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, which yields the true glory”

will know why we think that it is really important to emphasise not only input, and not even output, but outcome.

We have broadly supported the major expansion of apprenticeship starts, although the Government remain responsible for the target of 3 million starts by 2020, which, as I have said previously, came about through a curious set of circumstances. The Minister has rightly said that apprenticeships are vital to bridging the growing skills gap, and that potential expansion might fuel some of the cohorts needed to fill the gaps, so new clause 1 is timely, given the sorts of things, if not an exhaustive list, that we believe would demonstrate those desirable outcomes.

The truth of the matter is that, despite some progress in recent years, the situation for young people not in education, employment or training remains fragile. The most recent official figures show an increase in the number of 16 to 24-year-olds classed as economically inactive from July to December last year, which has increased the number of NEETs. As I have said previously, there remain question marks—with sector skills people, universities and the public sector—about the quality of those 3 million new apprenticeships. Young people themselves are very concerned that they should be quality apprenticeships. The level of satisfaction with apprenticeships has been high, and 2015 showed no change from previous years. However, it is extremely important that we monitor that satisfaction rate. In that process, we have to be watchful of the fragility of apprenticeship success rates, and those have fallen, from 76.4% in 2010-11 to 71.7% in 2014-15.

It is reasonable to look at the Government's own apprenticeship evaluation document for 2015. It shows a modest fall in the proportion of higher apprenticeships receiving formal training, from 84% to 79%, but it is a warning sign to the Government. That is why we believe that, now that we have these new routes and standards for technical education and apprenticeship expansion, it is vital to track the outcomes for each group. Last year's apprenticeship evaluation showed a slight increase in the proportion who had completed their apprenticeship, but we also need to look at particular areas where there have been higher levels of unemployment among those who have completed apprenticeships. That includes ICT, and arts and media, which had 11% unemployment, so those aspects need to be looked at. We hope that the Government will respond positively.

New clause 2 would do two separate things: first, to build on the Minister's assurances in Committee that an apprenticeship panel would be set up to report directly to the board; and, secondly, to ensure that there is a similar arrangement when the institute absorbs technical education into its remit in 2018. On the first point, I have to say how concerned I have been following the belated release of the consultation document for the institute's strategic guidance, which Peter Lauener, the shadow chief executive, promised us would appear before Christmas when he gave evidence to the Bill Committee. No doubt at some point in our exchanges this evening the Minister will want to tell us why that document did not appear before Christmas.

What the Minister did say in Committee—I thanked him for this—was this:

“I think we can square the circle by agreeing that the institute should draw on the experiences of apprentices, so I am pleased to announce that we expect the institute to invite apprentices to establish an apprentice panel, which would report directly to the board. The panel would be made up of apprentices from different occupations and experiences. The panel would decide for itself which issues to focus on...The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will ensure that the first panel is in place before the institute goes live in April 2017. The institute will consider how best to engage with apprentices on an ongoing basis and how best to represent technical education students ahead of it taking on that responsibility in April 2018.”—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee*, 29 November 2016; c. 145.]

Anyone reading the *Hansard* of that sitting would have come to the conclusion, as I did, that it was a welcome set of concessions from the Minister, and gave strong assurances that a panel would be set up before April.

However, we have been through the finer detail of the belated consultation document and have found a paragraph that says that an apprenticeship panel reporting directly to the institute's board would "perhaps" be set up

"to ensure that Apprentices have an opportunity to have their say about...education and training...and the chance to improve the experience of those who come after them."

Now, "perhaps"—Madam Deputy Speaker, you are a student of the English language, as I am sure most of us know—is a lot weaker than the assurance that was given by the Minister in Committee. Will he confirm that the panel will still be set up before April?

The Minister also said in Committee that the institute will look at

"how best to represent technical education students ahead of it taking on that responsibility in April 2018."—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee*, 29 November 2016; c. 145.]

Surely the logical step is to establish a similar panel for technical education students who are not undertaking apprenticeships. Hopefully, that similar panel will not be prefaced by phrases from the Minister's civil servants that include the word "perhaps." It is important that our experience and feedback help to guide the new institute, particularly as the timeframe and the capacities of the institute's resources are so limited.

I will come back to what we have said previously in Committee, and will make the comparison between what is going on in this Bill and in the Higher Education and Research Bill. If whatever structure the Department for Education eventually produces for getting the views of apprentices and technical education students seems in any way inferior to, or not done in the same way as, the concessions made by the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation on the Higher Education and Research Bill, people—students and the FE sector in general—will think yet again that they are being treated as second-class citizens. I appeal to the Minister to reassure us by repeating his assurance that the panel will be set up before April and by taking on board our new clause. If he is not able to accept it tonight, will he ensure that it is added to the Bill in another place?

New clause 4 would place on the Government a statutory requirement to produce a strategy on careers education. No one could fault the Minister on his enthusiasm verbally to get to grips with the subject—I am certainly not going to. It was one of the first things he said when he was appointed. In his regular columns in *FE Week*, he has continued to allude to the fact that we need, rapidly, to have a strong strategy. That is because the rhetoric on careers advice still does not match the woeful reality facing young people. I have seen, as I hope the Minister has, the disturbing report that has just been released by the Prince's Trust, showing that young people's self-confidence about their future is at its lowest ebb in eight years. A whole range of issues including advice, the state of jobs and thoughts of careers are cited with respect to that, but I will try not to stray from the new clause. We took the Minister at his word when he said in his new year article for *FE Week* that

"2017 is all about making sure that the careers advice and guidance on offer encourages people to pursue professional and technical education and apprenticeships as much as it does university."

New clause 4 would give a structure and framework to what he says.

During the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill, Government Members, including the Universities Minister, said, "We can assure you that we will take that on board," and this, that and the other. However, we are legislating not just for one Minister or one Parliament. With something such as further education, as with the Higher Education Bill, we are legislating, possibly, for something that has to stand for 15 or 20 years. It is no disrespect to the Minister to say that we appreciate his commitment but that we would like the duty to publish the strategy to be in the Bill. As he knows, a whole host of providers, employers and employers organisations have queued up to stress to his Department and to the previous Department—the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills—their exasperation with the way in which the Government have dealt with careers services in recent years. That is why, when I spoke to the Minister during Question Time in November, I said that the Government need to promote strong careers guidance and I referred to the cross-party verdict from two Select Committee Chairs. I think the Minister felt slightly aggrieved by that, but the truth is that if we are to make a success of the institute, these sorts of things have to be in the Bill. There has to be a mechanism for this House to hold to account Ministers of whatever party and whatever Government over the period of time for which the Bill is supposed to work.

**David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con):** I know the hon. Gentleman feels passionately about the subject, but does he not also agree with the fact that the Government have an overarching approach to careers advice, notwithstanding the Careers & Enterprise Company? It could be difficult to put arrangements that only apply to technical education into this Bill when there is a much broader issue at stake that the Government are tackling at a strategic level.

**Gordon Marsden:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman is saying. It is true, of course—but this is outwith the discussion that we are able to have this evening—that careers advice and education in this Bill does not start at 16 or at the remit of the DFE. It starts much earlier. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that that is an argument for doing nothing within the limited scope of the Bill, I do not agree. We need to do something. I would like to see the overarching structures that he mentioned but, unfortunately, at the moment I would be quite happy to see a limited overarching structure for the area that we are discussing. The challenge for the Minister is to talk about the £90 million that the Government have allocated to the Careers & Enterprise Company over the course of this Parliament, how it will be spent, how it is being distributed and whether it is adequate.

There are some damning statistics in the report produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships under the aegis of Semta. As the Minister knows, the proportion of respondents saying that their careers advice and guidance was poor or very poor has remained high across all sectors in all surveys from 2014 to 2016. The report says:

"Worryingly, this year 94 survey respondents, 6% of the total, said they had not received any careers IAG at all."

When we discussed the matter in Committee, those were the sorts of statistics that were available to us. I said—perfectly fairly, I thought—that, although the Careers & Enterprise Company was beginning to make progress, I did not believe that it was yet able to do the

necessary coverage because it is heavily reliant on volunteers. Early in December, we learnt that the company does not cater to every college in the country, including the whole of London. There are not just a few cold spots, but whole cold areas. There is a postcode lottery for FE coverage, with 15 local enterprise partnerships not covered and London completely absent.

The chief executive of the CEC, Claudia Harris, confirmed that the company did not work with any of the capital's 44 FE and sixth-form colleges. During an interview with *FE Week*, she blamed the lack of coverage on "ramp-up"—I think that is what lesser mortals would call the rolling out of pilots, but I await a definition from the Minister. Now, I am not laying the blame at the door of the Careers & Enterprise Company; the Government are expecting it to do too much with too little, and they should probably also think again about having a company that is so heavily reliant on volunteers to carry out these tasks.

6.30 pm

As I said, Claudia Harris said the offer would be expanded to all schools and colleges over the coming year. That is fine, but what are the budget indications? Is the Minister already working on the Chancellor on a substantial hike in funding for this area in the Budget? He will certainly need one if he is going to address the issues we are talking about in the new clause.

On top of that, a report in the middle of December from the Edge Foundation showed that the poor quality of careers advice was limiting young people's choices. Research carried out by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, and commissioned by the Edge Foundation and City and Guilds, found that only 1% of students viewed careers advice as the most important influence on their decision to stay on in further education and that over half said they wanted more information from employers.

As I said, the Minister's new year article for *FE Week* put priority on this issue, so I am taking him at his word. If his aims are indeed those he has set out, this new clause sets out fairly comprehensively how the process would operate—if there are technical or practical deficiencies with it or its draftsmanship, we would welcome any suggestions—and it is exactly what he needs to make his rhetoric a reality. There is an old saying that if wishes were horses, beggars would ride, so perhaps the Minister should get on his white charger and accept what we say; otherwise, he will remain a beggar come the Budget and will be looking for scraps from the Chancellor's table.

While we are on the subject of careers, the Minister mused on another issue last year at, I think, the Tory party conference. He talked—again, we absolutely applaud this, and I believe that the previous Education Secretary made some announcements about it—about plans to allow schools to give equal weight to vocational and academic routes when providing careers advice. However, we are told—or, at least, *The Times Educational Supplement* was told—that that has now been put on ice as well. Again, I would welcome a response from the Minister on those issues.

I want now to speak briefly about amendment 4, which would make sure that the institute must have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity

in widening access and participation. I think that the Minister and I agree that the Bill presents a real opportunity to reform long-neglected vocational pathways and to support post-16 institutions, but too few students from disadvantaged backgrounds are transitioning from level 2 to higher levels of study, so thousands of young people are not realising their potential. High-quality technical education and work-based training must act as a vehicle for social mobility. Giving the institute the obligation in the amendment would help to focus it on changing the status quo.

Currently, the Government do not publish data—I stand to be corrected—on the social background of apprentices, so it is difficult to assess just how many people from disadvantaged backgrounds start and complete apprenticeships. However, recent research published by the Social Mobility Commission found that, nationally, young people eligible for free school meals are half as likely to start and complete an apprenticeship as their better-off peers. Just under 50% of students in that category attain a grade A to C GCSE or level 2 equivalent in English or maths by 19, as opposed to 74% of their better-off peers. Of course they therefore lack the grades to enrol on level 3 pathways. Figures also show that only 36% of such students achieve a level 3 qualification, compared with 61% of their better-off peers. That shows the importance of having the transition year proposed in the post-16 skills plan. If that does not happen, and does not happen well, we will see a wider gap in access to the new technical routes, which will prevent them from being an effective vehicle for social mobility. An amendment to widen participation is therefore important.

Higher education has seen an increasing focus on widening participation, and HE institutions will invest £833 million in 2017-18 in widening participation. Further education, including apprenticeships, deserves the same attention and scrutiny. The institute must be required to measure and report annually on the gap between disadvantaged young people and their peers accessing and progressing from technical pathways.

Madam Deputy Speaker—welcome to you and a happy new year to you as well—if I was not so aware of the woeful inadequacy of the staffing proposals for the institute, I might suggest that the Government take a leaf out of HE's book and have an equivalent of the Office for Fair Access for FE students, but we are not asking for that tonight. What we are asking for is an appreciation of the fact that the institute needs the focus I have suggested.

I want to couple that with another issue. We have talked a lot in this Chamber over the past year about the timescale for delivering the 3 million target. Amendment 5 says the institute

"must co-operate with the Apprenticeship Delivery Board on progression into, and delivery of, apprenticeships."

Under its terms of reference, the delivery board was originally to be chaired by the chair of the Apprenticeship Ambassador Network and the Prime Minister's adviser on apprenticeships, and to provide support across all areas to ensure that the Government's ambition of achieving 3 million programme starts by 2020 was met. The terms of reference talked about the ADB's purpose being to

"implement an employer engagement strategy...increase the number of apprenticeships"

and

“secure new employer engagement”.

It sounded absolutely great, but when we actually delve a little further into the delivery of the board, it is not quite as it seems.

First, the terms of reference talk about it being co-chaired by the Prime Minister’s adviser on apprenticeships, but the Government’s tsar—the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi)—was stood down last autumn, and that left only David Meller, the private sector co-chair of the board, as its sole chair. People are bound to ask, where is the Government’s adviser on apprenticeships now?

How about the rest of the board? When the issue was raised in Committee, the Minister sang the praises of the Apprenticeship Delivery Board, but its role so far has been somewhat underwhelming. It may be a fine body, but its members were drawn from a relatively narrow section of business, and, incidentally, they had only one woman among their number. There was no role for other bodies, such as FE providers, universities, trade unions or local authorities. To be fair, there has been some progress on the number of women on the ADB, and it now has three, but it is important that the lessons are taken on board with the institute.

When the board was announced, it was advertised as being a key part of the process: it was not simply there to be a bully pulpit but was to have a very direct and active role. Naturally, I questioned the Minister on that in Committee, where he responded:

“I reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Apprenticeship Delivery Board is in full flow. I meet it and its chairman regularly. It goes up and down the country and works with businesses to encourage them to employ apprentices. Much of our success has been because of that board’s incredible work.”—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Bill Public Bill Committee, 24 November 2016; c. 83.*]

Yet having examined the minutes of the board, I do not get quite the same sense of achievement, because what they show, over the summer period, is a couple of employees from large employers telling each other about random conversations or meetings they have, or plan to have, with the occasional presentation from the Skills Funding Agency about its marketing plans. Very little co-ordinated action seems to have been taken over the summer months, and it is quite clear to me that the delivery board is not currently fulfilling that role. That is why we have tabled this amendment.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education does not have the resources or capacity to be taking on these responsibilities; its focus is supposed to be on developing standards. We know from the shadow chief executive that staffing levels and finance will be limited, with 60 staff, possibly rising to 100 when the technical education elements kick in, and there is a very short space of time between now and its April start. I should mention the princely budget of £8 million a year on which the institute is supposed to operate initially. There has to be more focused and targeted marketing. The delivery board is not just a trade fair, as the minutes suggest; it is meant to help to deliver and increase the number of apprenticeships, and it must co-operate with the institute to succeed. That is vital now that the Government have scrapped any involvement they had and, presumably, forgotten about apprenticeship tsars.

We have also tabled an amendment to try to get some clarity and to put some focus on to the Government with regard to delivering money that will be additional to, or a substitute for, existing Government funding. We were told that the Government were already spending £1.5 billion on apprenticeships in 2016, and we are now told that the levy is expected to raise £2.9 billion by 2020, of which, at the latest count, £2.4 billion will be spent in England. So where does the additional money go? Last year, I submitted a written question on this to the then Skills Minister and got a sort-of response saying:

“By 2019-20 we expect...to spend £2.5 billion on apprenticeships in England.”

My maths told me at that time that if £2.5 billion was raised from the sector and the Government were currently putting in £1.5 billion, that means an extra £1 billion, as mentioned in the Minister’s reply. I therefore come back to the point that we raised early last year: what will happen to the remaining £1.5 billion raised? Will there be 40% for apprenticeships with 60% going straight back to the Treasury? The challenge remains for the Government to convince employers and stakeholders that this remains a genuinely long-term funding commitment for apprenticeships and not just something that becomes regarded as a Treasury payroll tax.

**Rob Marris:** I apologise somewhat for interrupting my hon. Friend’s magnificent speech. Part of the problem with the apprenticeship levy is that the Government are all over the place on it. I talked to a major supermarket chain that has employees in Scotland and whose payroll is of sufficient magnitude that it will have to pay the apprenticeship levy, but because of devolution there is no guarantee that, in Scotland, its apprenticeship levy funding will in fact be used for apprenticeships. That may be the case in Wales and Northern Ireland as well—I know not. This may go some way towards explaining the gap that my hon. Friend has put his finger on very acutely about where the money is going. The reason is that it is matter for the Treasury, which has not yet got to grips with devolution.

**Gordon Marsden:** My hon. Friend, as usual, makes a very interesting and succinct point. If I were not constrained by talking about this amendment, we could have some very interesting conversations about how the devolution situation is panning out, but I need to stick to my last.

The other point that is germane to this amendment is the coming Budget. We now know that the Budget will be in the first week of March, so issues about what the rate and the threshold of the apprenticeship levy might be after its first year obviously come to mind. The former Chief Secretary to the Treasury, after much prompting and questioning during the previous Administration of David Cameron, said that

“the government will keep the apprenticeship levy under review.”

So, as we all know, it could go up and of course, theoretically, go down. The level at which it is set, and how much companies get back from it, will be crucial in deciding whether it is a success or a flop. Given that it is only eight weeks until Budget day, what conversations has the Minister had with the Treasury to make sure that it gets the balance right? The more we hear—I said this in May and say it again today—about how the levy

will now need to fund the top-up, the devolved Administrations, English and maths at level 2, disadvantaged learners, incentive payments and non-levy payers, the more it seems inevitable that the Government will end up increasing it.

6.45 pm

I want now to deal with some of the slightly more technical amendments. Amendment 7 to schedule 1 is designed to ensure that the situation for privately funded training and bespoke qualifications is clarified. Without clarification, we are told, there is a danger, within the scope of the institute and Secretary of State rulings on technical qualifications, that steps on becoming competent may extend into professional accreditation schemes paid for solely by learners or employers. We do not believe that it is the Government's intention to include this possibility, but we propose the addition of state funding to clarify the position.

**Rob Marris:** I am a little bemused by this amendment, although I think I understand it. It seems to me that it would be desirable, certainly within England, if not within the United Kingdom, to have a national framework of standards such that the framework should not simply apply to qualifications that were obtained through a state-funded institution but be spread more broadly. Perhaps my hon. Friend could say a little more about his approach.

**Gordon Marsden:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of a national framework. Various research reports over many years indicate that the privately funded training market has been exceeding the publicly funded one by considerable amounts, and that includes specialist management training, IT vendor qualifications, and project and programme management. The Government may need to look a bit more carefully at how this process is going to move forward. I absolutely agree about the need to have an overarching national framework, which we do not currently have.

Amendment 8 would ensure that the mapping of occupation groups had particular regard to people aged 16 to 24. This is crucial, because many apprenticeship training providers are reporting that, under the new levy system, employers are deciding to choose apprentices aged over 19 rather than 16 to 18-year-olds, particularly with regard to the new standards. Employers say that there is very little incentive left for them to take on younger learners, especially in the higher funding bands where a £1,000 employer incentive is a small fraction of the overall funding available. As the Minister will know, the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, which has, up until now, predominantly delivered apprenticeships to 16 to 18-year-olds, is seeing the majority of its business switch from this age group to older individuals.

If one looks at Lord Sainsbury's comments and the skills plan commentary in relation to the changes in funding giving parity to older learners, one can see that the majority of apprentices in this age band are already 18, with little effort to change that through careers support. Perhaps that is the Government's plan. If so, the Government need to be honest and to tell us that; if not, something needs to change as otherwise we are in danger of ending up with fewer apprenticeship opportunities for 16 to 18-year-olds.

I want to quote to the Minister some recent remarks of JTL, a training provider. About the new system, it says:

"Our employers say that under the new system when the traditional age differentials in funding rates are removed, they would sooner employ young people aged 19 and over. Some 16- and 17-year-olds aren't allowed on site due to health and safety rules, and many of them have yet to pass their driving test, but the present funding makes it still worthwhile to take them on. Remove the incentive and employers will switch back to recruiting older apprentices."

It went on to say—I hope the Minister will give this point careful thought, given the emphasis on STEM—that the

"so-called £1,000 incentive for employers to recruit 16- to 18-year-olds simply doesn't work for STEM sectors. Our level three apprenticeships typically last four years, meaning the incentive equates to a mere £5 per week, which is of no interest to employers given the additional challenges of younger employees."

That is a timely new year reminder to the Minister that the concessions he made after the Save Our Apprenticeships campaign, with which our party was very pleased to be involved—as he knows, the campaign involved a very broad range of people, whom he met and to whom promised changes—have not solved the problem. The concessions applied a temporary sticking plaster to the problem, and it remains to be seen how long it will stick. Coming on top of the continued lack of certainties about the new structures for apprenticeships and the delayed consultation, there must be concern about the fragility of the Government's performance in the 16-to-18 area. In FE sectors, such as mine in Blackpool, we desperately need to get such young people skilled apprenticeships, which means looking for them now.

As I am sure the Minister knows, the AELP has raised the issue that a framework of only 15 routes across technical education might create an elitist system of education that denies many young people a work-based route to level 2 or 3. We remain concerned about that, given that so many young people in the service sector are not likely to be automatically covered. I know that there have been conversations saying that this is not really about apprenticeships, but about technical education. Whether it is about apprenticeships or technical education, however, young people in Blackpool and everywhere else need good training, whether from the service sector or the manufacturing sector. I would have thought that focusing on that would make a major contribution to this Government's social justice agenda and even, arguably, to anticipating the impact of Brexit if controls on migrant labour are introduced. It is important to have a skills strategy that is inclusive, and this is a perfect opportunity to create such a coherent, inclusive strategy that covers a wide range of different abilities and aptitudes and that strives for excellence. That is what amendment 8 intends to do.

I want to talk briefly to amendment 9, which is about all apprenticeship standards needing to include a recognised technical qualification. As the Minister will know, it is not only we who have been concerned about this; a range of organisations—most recently, AELP—has been concerned about the omission of qualifications from some of the new standards. The investment in time and resource is leading to employer fatigue in some areas, and there is a lack of engagement. According to AELP, just under 50% of the current standards released still do not include a mandatory qualification. One alternative

[Gordon Marsden]

solution is our proposed amendment, which would make the whole apprenticeship, rather than simply its components, into a recognised qualification.

I want to move on to amendment 10, which I will group with amendments 11 to 16 and, indeed, amendments 18 to 21. Amendment 10 is about the need to change the title of “course document” to

“standard or technical assessment design specification”.

That would ensure that copyright was acquired only at a level equivalent to apprenticeships. It is argued that underpinning occupational standards and technical assessment design specifications that are the equivalent of assessment plans is all that is needed for Crown copyright. City and Guilds has specifically raised with us the issue of the imposition of acquired copyright in evidence, as have other groups.

We have tabled the amendments because there is concern that imposing acquired copyright is one of the most significant risks to the future vitality of the technical education market in the UK. I accept that this is a complex and technical area, but the Minister needs to look at it carefully. It is not simply a question of existing providers wanting to set in stone a form of protectionism; it is about intellectual property, and where intellectual property starts and ends. The concern of many providers is that there has been a degree of mission creep in that respect in the way in which the Bill has been drafted. From a pragmatic point of view, I must say that if the broader definition of what the institute has to do on copyright remains in the Bill, even more resources may be required to police it, and I have already mentioned that there is a lack of such support. We need to look at these important issues.

The concern that each technical level will have only one awarding organisation has been raised by both the Centre for the Study of Market Reform of Education and NCFE. NCFE has said that, as currently set out, with some of the technical levels going to only one awarding organisation, having one would be unfortunate, but—to misquote Oscar Wilde—to have two might be beneficial. That would provide competition and enable providers to switch quickly in the event of problems, without the multiplication issues that have caused problems and difficulties elsewhere. NCFE has said, more in sorrow than in anger, that the

“current proposals do not seem to recognise the great expertise in designing and assessing Technical and Professional Education qualifications that already exists within Awarding Organisations.”

Our amendments 11 to 16 are consequential on amendment 9. Under an exclusive licensing model, the licence holder for a particular qualification may assume a quasi-monopoly position for the duration of the contracts. That is one of the reasons why the proposals are designed to move away from that principle. It seems to us that the principle should be that there needs to be a rationalisation of the operations of awarding organisations, but not necessarily to the point of having single operators on a licence, given the monopoly and single point of failure issues alongside all the intellectual property rights and Crown copyright ones. I repeat to the Minister that this is a complicated area and I appreciate that it is not easy to get the balance right, but I urge him to think very carefully about some of the

representations that have been made and, if he is not able to do anything about them tonight, to at least bring forward solutions in the other place.

The final area on which I want to comment briefly—I have talked about routes and all the rest—is the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Amendments 18 to 21 would ensure that the QAA was included in the list of organisations required to share information, and that degree apprenticeships were fully covered by such a requirement. Ofsted should have the authority to inspect every apprenticeship. We welcome the growth in degree apprenticeships and expect many more under the levy, but some are not genuinely work-based learning and are a rebranding of more vocationally biased degrees. Stricter monitoring is therefore needed. We argue that the involvement of the QAA is very important in this respect. It is vital that apprenticeships are just that: proper apprenticeships, with which Ofsted and Ofqual need to be well and properly engaged.

I am aware that the Opposition amendments have had to be discussed in considerable detail and some are technical, but the broad thrust of what we are trying to do is: first, to ask the Government to act on their commitments in Committee; and, secondly, to go further than that and make the rhetoric around social mobility and widening participation a reality. The only way to do that is to improve the Bill with the amendments we have tabled this evening.

7 pm

**The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Robert Halfon):** I think this is the first time that a lapel microphone has been used in this way—I appreciate that. I wish the House, and the many apprentices who worked over Christmas and the new year, a very happy new year. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for chairing the debate. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) for his amendments—as ever, very thoughtful.

I will start by discussing new clause 1, but I just want to make the point that the hon. Gentleman talked about the completion of apprenticeships. Some 70% of apprentices complete and 90% get either employment or further training. We have nearly 900,000 apprentices, an all-time high and a record in our nation's history, so we are making good progress. He talked about NEETs. He will know that between 2014 and 2015 the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds in education or work-based learning increased to 90%, which is the highest on record. The percentage of NEETs fell to 6.5%, the lowest rate since records began. He talked about the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education appointments and went on, yet again, about Christmas. I have to say that IFATE is not just for Christmas, it is for life and we want to get it right. We want to ensure that the appointments we make are the right ones and are not made in haste. He sometimes says that we are doing things too quickly and at other times he says that we are doing things too slowly.

On new clause 1, as I explained in Committee, the institute will be required to report on its activities annually under schedule 4 to the Enterprise Act 2016, and the report must be placed before Parliament. That provision will also allow the Secretary of State to ask the institute to report on anything else she thinks

appropriate, such as the information requested in the amendment. We think it would be an unnecessary and significant duplication of effort, as the information is already collected and published by the Secretary of State on the performance of the FE sector, which includes apprentices—I gave the hon. Gentleman some of the figures only a moment ago.

Much of that information goes far beyond the role of the institute. The institute's core role from April 2017 is to oversee and quality assure the development of standards and assessment plans for use in delivering apprenticeships. Under the reforms in the Bill, college-based technical education cannot be held wholly responsible for, for example, job outcomes and wage rates of apprentices once they complete their apprenticeships. It is essential that the institute is aware of the impact it is making. We would expect it to make good use of the data on the outcomes made available to it through these public data sources and surveys, and to explain in its annual report how it has deployed them.

**Rob Marris:** I am grateful to the Minister for the work he does. He is very committed—whenever I see him he is wearing an “A” on his lapel to show his support for apprenticeships. Will he clarify one point in relation to new clause 1(2)(e), which would include in the report the satisfaction rates of employers? He will be aware that there is some concern that to reach the 3 million target there will be dilution. I am not saying there will be, but that there is concern that there might be. Is the satisfaction rate of employers currently collected—not for every employer, but through sampling—and published? If it is not, it would be very important for it to be published, so that the concerns about a dilution of standards could be somewhat allayed.

**Robert Halfon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind comments. It is published. I think, if I am not mistaken, employer satisfaction is near 90%; it might be 88% or 85% or something like that. I am very happy to provide him with the information if he so requires.

I agree with the hon. Member for Blackpool South that the institute needs to consider the views of those who take an apprenticeship or a course in technical education. I am confident that it will do that. He will know—he pointed it out—that last week we published draft strategic guidance for the institute. In this document, which is now open for consultation, we set out that we expect the institute to establish an apprentice panel that will report directly to the board. I am pleased to say to the hon. Gentleman that it will be ready by April 2017, but the wider point is that we should not rush things. We need to get it right. The apprentice panel will be made up of apprentices from different occupations and experience. The panel will decide for itself which issues to focus on, and will challenge and make recommendations to the board. I am sure it will be a success. It will ensure that the views of apprentices are fed directly into the institute's governance. It might not be exactly the right model in practice. I want to see how it works. I believe that the institute, particularly in its infancy, should have the flexibility and the freedom to decide the best way of gathering the views of an apprenticeship on an ongoing basis. Whatever model it adopts, I would expect the institute to do something similar for technical education students when it takes on this responsibility, but I want to see how the apprentice panel pans out.

**Gordon Marsden:** I thank the Minister for giving way with his customary courtesy. I just want to be absolutely clear about the implications of the wording of the document. Is he giving an assurance on the Floor of the House that the panel will be set up by April, that he will review the panel's progress and whether it has the right form and structure, and that if he thinks it does not have the right form or structure he will replace it with something equally valuable in representing the views of apprenticeships to the board of the institute?

**Robert Halfon:** I am pleased to give the hon. Gentleman that guarantee. The panel will be set up by April. I believe it would be pointless to have an Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education without proper apprentice representation, but I want to see what the best format is. I am sure it will work and be a success, but I just want, as I said, to see how it pans out. We expect the institute then to do something similar for technical education students.

I agree with the motivation behind the amendment, but I am concerned about enshrining the establishment of panels in legislation. I do not want to put the institute in a constant straitjacket of legislative red tape that reflects every good idea there may be on how best to fulfil its responsibilities. I therefore think the amendment is unnecessary and would undermine the institute's power to regulate its own governance and perform its duty.

On new clause 4, the hon. Member for Batley and Spenningsdale (Tracy Brabin) made a remarkable speech in Committee on a careers strategy. She cares passionately about this, as I do, but I think we do have meat on the bones. It is not just words. The hon. Member for Blackpool South talked about budgets. We are spending £90 million, which includes the work of the Careers & Enterprise Company. A separate £77 million is being spent on National Careers Service guidance just this year. I am going further. I am looking at a careers strategy from the beginning to ensure that we address our skills needs, and to look at how we can help the most disadvantaged. I am looking at how we can ensure widespread and quality provision, and how that leads to jobs and security. I will set out my plans on careers over the coming weeks.

On the investment in the Careers & Enterprise Company, the hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that there was no activity in London. I have been to a school in east London supported by the Careers & Enterprise Company and the local enterprise partnership. It is doing remarkable work. Some 1,300 advisers are connecting schools and colleges. They are slowly creating a way to connect with 250,000 students in 75% of the cold spots around the country. There is also money for mentoring. He talked about a famine. I would not say there is a feast, but substantive and serious funds are going in. I could spend a lot of time listing the different moneys, but if he looks at this carefully and fairly, he will see the work that the Careers & Enterprise Company is doing.

We will monitor carefully the impact of our work. In January 2017, destination data will be included in national performance tables for the first time, ensuring an even sharper focus on the success of schools and colleges in supporting their students. Before my time, we legislated to ensure that schools gave independent careers advice on skills and apprenticeships—that was done by my

[Robert Halfon]

predecessor. Work is being done in schools. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's thoughtfulness in proposing the new clause, but it is my view that it is not necessary because of the action we are taking, the careers plans I am developing and the money that is being spent, which I have highlighted.

As the hon. Gentleman said, amendment 4 would require the institute to have regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity. I welcome the opportunity to debate that. I know why he tabled the amendment and why it is important. It is crucial to widen access and participation, and to ensure that apprenticeships and technical education are accessible to all, which is why I was glad that, for this year, we have our £60 million fund to help to encourage apprenticeships in the most deprived areas of our country.

I reassure the House that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will have to have due regard to widening access and participation. We carried out an equalities impact assessment before publishing the post-16 skills plan, which concluded that the reforms are likely to have a positive impact on individuals with protected characteristics, in particular those with special educational needs or disability, those with prior attainment and those who are economically disadvantaged. The economic assessment concluded that all learners would benefit from the proposed technical education reforms, which will give people access to high-quality technical education courses.

I believe that the need to promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in further and technical education already exists in legislation under sections 149 and 150 of the Equality Act 2010. It is expressly set out in section ZA2 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 that the institute must have regard to

“the reasonable requirements of persons who may wish to undertake education and training within”

its “remit”. The Secretary of State has the power to provide the institute with further guidance under that section. I hope that that explanation gives the hon. Gentleman confidence. I am committed to ensuring that people of all backgrounds have equal opportunities. As he will know, over Christmas we removed the need for apprentices who have serious hearing difficulties to do functional English—they can do sign language instead. That is an example my commitment, as is the extra funding we are giving to employers and providers to get more apprentices who are disabled.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** Will the Minister confirm that bringing together oversight of apprenticeships and technical education in one place will bring coherence into the system, which will ensure and protect diversity and equal opportunity because there will be clearer guidance on all opportunities for career progression?

7.15 pm

**Robert Halfon:** My hon. Friend, who campaigns a lot on diversity and equality, is absolutely right. The proposal will benefit the people who need it most. Many people from disadvantaged backgrounds and with disabilities are prominent in further and technical education.

Amendment 5 addresses the Apprenticeship Delivery Board. The hon. Member for Blackpool South was a little unkind about the board. The board's representatives include the chief executive of Channel 4, the Compass Group, the City of London, Barclays bank, Sunmart Ltd, Fujitsu, Wates construction, the Ministry of Defence and a significant retail sector member. As he said, there are three women on the board. They are doing important work. They advise the Government and work with businesses to encourage them to have apprentices. As far as I am aware, those people are not being paid. They do not have to do it; they do it because they want to serve our country. They have helped the Apprentice Ambassador Network. The chair, David Meller, is doing important work on that and running the board. I pay tribute to the board. I mean this kindly, but I would not be obsessed with whether or not the Prime Minister has an apprenticeship adviser. As far as I am concerned, the Prime Minister's advisers are the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, which is me, and my boss the Secretary of State. A new adviser for the Prime Minister will not change the course of history for apprentices in our country.

**Rob Marris:** Most of us would see the Minister as a journeyman or time-served Minister rather than as the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills. He will forgive me for not researching this earlier, but I did not notice in the list he read out any trade union representation. Unusually for Conservative Members, he is an active trade unionist—or he was. Does he agree that it would be desirable to have trade union representation on that board to get buy-in from the workforce side?

**Robert Halfon:** The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that I am still a trade unionist. That is a good idea. The board is independent, but I will suggest it. I am very impressed and supportive of the work that Unionlearn does, which is why we have agreed to fund it by £12 million. It works to promote training and apprenticeships.

The institute will consult the Apprenticeship Delivery Board and other bodies but, as I have said, we do not need to straitjacket the institute with so much red tape that we stop it from being independent. The delivery board is not intended to have any special legislative standing or corporate identity. It would be unusual to name it in legislation, but the institute will consult the board along with others.

Amendment 6 would require the institute's expenditure in any one year to exceed that raised by the levy. It is important to clarify that the institute will not have responsibility for the apprenticeship budget, which resides with the Secretary of State for Education. Although the institute is not a funding body, it will be asked to advise on the pricing of apprenticeship standards and allocation to funding bands. The institute's operations will be funded by my Department and not from the levy funds. It follows that the institute should not be obliged to spend funds raised under the levy.

On devolution, which the hon. Member for Blackpool South mentioned, it will be up to the devolved authorities how they spend the money. If we were to tie the spending explicitly to the levy receipts, there could be adverse funding consequences for the programme as a whole. The budget for spending on apprenticeships in 2019-20

for England and the devolved Administrations totals in excess of £2.9 billion, whereas the projected levy income is £2.8 billion. Having certainty over the funding for apprenticeship training is preferable to linking the funding on a year-by-year basis directly to the wider performance of the economy.

**Mims Davies:** Eastleigh College, which is the third-largest college providing apprenticeships in England and trains over 9,000 apprentices, is particularly interested in how the funding formula for the institute will work and how that will support its work with communities, so the Minister's clarity today around the levy, the funding criteria and how it will be delivered is very welcome.

**Robert Halfon:** I thank my hon. Friend. It is brilliant that her college is providing such training, and I would be pleased to come and see its training programme when I am next in the area. That it is doing this means that it will also be receiving significant funds. I congratulate the college on the work it is doing on apprenticeships.

Amendment 7 would limit the power to confer new functions on the institute to "state funded" apprenticeships and technical education. All the institute's current functions in part 4 of, and schedule 4 to, the Enterprise Act 2016 and in schedule 1 to the Bill apply to all reformed apprenticeships and technical education qualifications, not just those that are state funded. We would therefore expect that any new functions the institute is required to carry out should also apply in the same way, to ensure that they are fully effective and do not treat some apprenticeships and technical education courses differently in accordance with how they are paid for. We want to ensure that as many people as possible can undertake an apprenticeship or technical education course, and we would not want this to be restricted to those that are state funded purely because the institute's functions have been limited.

On amendment 8, it is important that the institute considers what apprenticeships might be appropriate for 16 to 24-year-olds. We know that apprenticeships are incredibly important to school leavers and are making sure that anyone from the age of 16 will have an offering of either an academic or technical education or an apprenticeship. The occupational maps that the institute will put together and which will guide apprenticeships and technical education qualifications will be based on information about the skills needs of the country. They will focus on occupations that can help to increase the UK's productivity and meet the needs of employers. Putting any constraint around the development of the maps and the occupations included, such as by focusing on a particular group of the population, could damage this overall aim.

My Department runs a number of highly successfully promotional and advice services to help to ensure that young people access the right apprenticeship for them. A significant number of 16 to 18-year-olds take up STEM subjects.

**Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab):** On STEM subjects and the advice given to young people, successive Governments have tried to effect change, and the Bill, which is well meaning, will make a positive difference in many respects, but is not the real problem the fact that

successive Governments have failed to persuade people that the vocational route is as good as the academic route? Is this not a cultural problem that has bedevilled our country for decades?

**Robert Halfon:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right. When I talk about my priorities for skills and education, one of the first things I mention is transforming the prestige and the culture. As he says, this is regardless of what party is in government, and it is not just about Governments either; businesses have also underinvested. Vocational training has always been seen as a so-called—I hate the term—Cinderella sector. The whole purpose of the Sainsbury reforms and the levy is to change behaviours and give apprenticeships and skills and technical education the prestige they deserve.

**Vernon Coaker:** The question for the Minister, as it was for me and others here when we were schools Ministers, be we Conservative, Liberal Democrat or Labour, is this: why will it be different this time? The Minister is absolutely right in what he has said, but why will it be different this time from all the times that have gone before?

**Robert Halfon:** Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I was not around for all the other times that have gone before. We have our differences, of course, but there is much cross-party consensus on the Sainsbury reforms, for example. Moreover, the apprenticeship levy is a fundamental reform to change behaviours—it is not just about raising money; it also changes behaviours. I believe that there is a new national conversation about apprenticeships and that things are changing, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating. I think we are on the tip of something special, but a lot more work needs to be done.

Because of time, I will speak only briefly on some of the other amendments. On amendment 9, the hon. Member for Blackpool South raised some important points, but we feel that the amendment is unnecessary. The important feature of approved English apprenticeship standards is the move away from a reliance on a series of small and pre-existing qualifications making up an apprenticeship and towards a single end-point assessment. By not mandating qualifications in standards unless they meet one of these criteria, we are ensuring that individual employers have the freedom and flexibility to determine how to train their own apprentices to ensure they gain full competency. It is expected that the institute will continue with this approach.

The provisions on education copyright are very complicated, and I understand why the hon. Gentleman has raised them, but we do not think that the proposed provisions are necessary. Some of the concerns are covered by existing legislation, but we believe that the institute should have the right of copyright, and the bodies working with the institute will know that. We do not agree with the word "route" either because it could be confusing for employers. I want this form of training to be prestigious, and so I want the words "technical education". I do not like the term "tech levels" either because it dumbs down a very important qualification.

Amendment 17 is on the power to charge for technical education certificates, and I should say that we also have a duty of care to the taxpayer. The institute will not make money out of this provision. It is all about

[Robert Halfon]

giving it the power to do so if it so chooses and about having a duty of care to the taxpayer. It is for that important reason that we do not support the amendment.

On the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and amendments 18 to 21, the organisations named in the provisions will all have an important role. The omission of the QAA reflects in part the changes being introduced in the Higher Education and Research Bill, which is currently in the other place. Amendment 20, which specifies that the term “apprenticeships” should include those offered by higher education institutions, is not required. I am clear that the term “apprenticeships” includes all apprenticeships offered at all levels, regardless of the training provider.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for Blackpool South for his thoughtful new clauses and amendments on technical education and I thank other hon. Members for their contributions. I hope that my responses have reassured the hon. Gentleman and the House on their underlying concerns. I therefore ask that he withdraw new clause 1 and not press his other amendments.

**Rob Marris:** If you will allow me a little latitude, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to place my remarks on the amendments in context. I was recently speaking to someone who made a very good point about who is fitting all the kitchens and bathrooms in Poland. This person had experienced very good electricians from Romania working in this country. Our conversation was about Brexit and the skills shortage in the United Kingdom. Whichever side of the debate hon. Members supported, Brexit provides our country with an opportunity to try to address the skills shortages that we have had for decades and have relied for filling on importing workers.

7.30 pm

Figures have been bandied about, and I do not know the exact figure—perhaps other right hon. or hon. Members do—on the proportion of NHS employees who were trained abroad. I think we would all concede that it is quite a high proportion. Those people often, though not always, come from countries that can ill afford to lose them. The United Kingdom as a rich country ends up, because we have not got our technical education and apprenticeships architecture correct, poaching skilled labour from countries that desperately need that labour to build their own economies.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** My hon. Friend is making very thoughtful points. He may be aware that there is now a fairly successful political party in Lithuania that is against emigration, not immigration, for that very reason.

**Rob Marris:** I am not surprised about that. In the last Parliament but one, I had the joy of visiting Lithuania with what was then the Trade and Industry Committee, and that was the sort of issue we talked about. In those days, Lithuania was already starting to import labour from Moldova—outside the European Union—because so many Lithuanians had come with their skills particularly to the United Kingdom and Ireland to ply their respective trades, and I specifically mean trades.

What my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) has sought to do from the Labour Front Bench is to beef up the Bill in two ways. One is to introduce even greater confidence in the new system that we will have, and part of that confidence building means moving towards national standards. This partly addresses the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) about parity of esteem. We talked earlier this afternoon about parity between mental and physical health, but in this case, we are talking about parity of esteem between the vocational and the academic.

Having been a semi-skilled worker for a number of years as a professional driver and a bus driver, I faced a fork in the road. Was I going to go down the vocational route—I had my eye on being a plumber—or was I going to go down the academic route with an eye to being a lawyer? I went down the academic route and I became a lawyer. I do not regret that at all. One reason I did so related to esteem or lack thereof, and another reason was that lawyers get to work indoors whereas plumbers sometimes have to work on building sites outdoors—and I do not like the cold. I am talking about quite a while ago, and the money was better in law than it was in plumbing. I am not sure whether that remains the case nowadays.

We live in a capitalist society. Part of what needs to be done to move towards parity of esteem in a cultural sense is the sort of thing that the Minister has attempted to do during his tenure of office and through this Bill; and, frankly, in a capitalist society, part of it is about paying people more. If we want parity of esteem, we should start paying people equal amounts of money—and pay plumbers as much as lawyers. Given that we live under capitalism, we are moving towards that because of skills shortages.

On new clause 1, I quite understand the Minister’s point that some of the information is already published as a result of the Enterprise Act 2016, but I believe that building this into the Bill as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South has proposed, would be helpful for sending out the right message about confidence. It is the same with new clause 2, so that the representative panels can become more representative when they are put in place. I welcome the Minister’s assurance this afternoon that those panels will be in place by April, and I hope they will have a breadth of representation that should, I think, be built into the Bill. I asked the Minister a similar question in a slightly different context about the involvement of trade unions. This is not just a tit-for-tat along the lines of “You have the bosses there, so we have to have the workers there,” although that is important; it more about getting buy-in to the new regime from all sections of our society to build towards addressing the skills shortages that we will face, as I have said, under Brexit.

Under Brexit, there is no mistake about it: the price for staying in the single market would be free movement of labour and people; and the UK population has said that it is not up for that and does not want free movement of people or labour. We will therefore not be in the single market, but we will not have free movement either, because there will be restrictions—whether Members like it or not. We should use these circumstances in a positive way, so that local people can train up for jobs and so that we do not keep poaching skilled people

from abroad—whether from Lithuania, as my hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) mentioned, or elsewhere. For that, we need national standards.

When it comes to confidence, we need proper advice. Careers advice in England has certainly been, to say the least, patchy over the years. I remember when my Government set up Connexions, which was not exactly a resounding success—certainly not in the west midlands. I urge the Minister to think again about new clause 4, which is all to do with building confidence. That is particularly clear in paragraphs (b) and (d) of new clause 4(3). These highlight the fact that the Secretary of State should seek to

“ensure that such information, advice and guidance may be taken into account by relevant authorities and partners to meet the needs of local or combined authority areas”

and to

“monitor the outcomes of such information, advice and guidance for recipients.”

It is part of confidence building that we have a regime that is sensitive to local labour markets, which will change greatly from April 2019 when we are out of the European Union.

This Bill is part of the Government—surprisingly, given what is not happening in other areas—showing a bit of foresight, on which I congratulate the Minister. If only we had such foresight about Brexit ramifications for other areas of public endeavour; we do not, but this Bill is a step forward and part of that jigsaw. I am not saying that this is why the Minister has sought to introduce the Bill, but I do think we should look on it positively in that way, and I think that new clause 4 would help to build confidence in the new system, by ensuring that it would be reflective and flexible.

In referring to amendment 9 and others that my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South said were in a sense under its umbrella—amendments 10 to 16—the Minister talked about employers having freedom and flexibility. Amendment 9 deals with “recognised technical qualifications” and these are connected, certainly for England as I said, with national standards. We need those standards as part of the confidence-building measures, but also to make sure that we get the right people with the right skills—in a sense, workforce planning.

This country is pretty poor at workforce planning. The one area where we could have excellent workforce planning because the number of employees is so enormous and they almost all work for the state is in healthcare delivery, yet it is absolutely appalling. We do not have enough doctors trained here; we do not have enough dentists trained here; we certainly do not have enough nurses trained here; we do not have enough professions allied to medicine—whether radiographers or phlebotomists and so forth—trained here. Yet this is the one area of workforce planning that the Government could get right. I do not mean that only this Government have singularly failed. Under the coalition Government, things went backwards when some nurse training places were shut down. Figures on the number of employees working in the NHS in England alone are so huge that we could take social trends into account and do some pretty good workforce planning on the kind of skills that will be needed in five years or the 10 years that it takes to train a doctor, and so forth.

Arguably, we have been absolute rubbish at this since 1948. Having national standards is important not just for confidence, but for workforce planning. That is why I again urge the Minister to have another think about the import of amendment 9, if not its wording. It is all very well having flexibility and freedom for employers. These were the sort of words that the Minister used—he will correct me if I am wrong—when he explained why he thought amendment 9 was unnecessary and invited my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South to withdraw it. In my view, however, the Minister should have another think about that, because I believe that national standards are important. Again, I draw on my own experience. When I qualified as a lawyer, I took a national exam that had to be taken by all those seeking to become solicitors in England and Wales. For most of us, if we passed, that led to what was, in a sense, the equivalent of an apprenticeship. It was called “articles of clerkship”, and it involved two years in a solicitor’s office. What had been a national exam taken by everyone who wished to be a solicitor in England and Wales then became a moderated Law Society final exam. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens) will remind me what it was called. [HON. MEMBERS: “Legal practice course.”] Yes. It became a legal practice course, and standards went down. I say that having talked to people in post-secondary institutions at the time and having trained articulated clerks who had experienced the later system when national standards no longer existed.

National standards are not, of course, a guarantee of quality output, but they can be used by any Government, legitimately and properly, to ensure that we have confidence in the system and to ensure that those who undergo an apprenticeship process and emerge from it fully qualified have a qualification that is worth their having as individuals, and worth our society having.

**Robert Halfon:** Qualifications may be mandatory in an apprenticeship standard if that is a mandatory requirement set by the regulator. They include qualifications that are recognised as a legal requirement—that is, licence to practise—that are required for professional registration, or that are used in a hard sift when apprentices are applying for jobs in the occupation related to the standard and would be disadvantaged in the job market without them.

**Rob Marris:** I thank the Minister for that clarification. In a sense, he has made my point for me. There will be some national standards in certain fields of endeavour, which he has helpfully specified. However, I think that there is a contradiction in his position, a contradiction from which I do not think I suffer.

Amendment 7, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South, would insert the words “state-funded”. I found the Minister’s argument persuasive when he explained why he thought that the amendment should not be passed. I may have misunderstood what he said, but he seemed to be saying that he wanted a more overarching model that would encompass privately obtained qualifications. I agree with him. I merely suggest that, if amendment 7 is not accepted, it would be logical to accept something along the lines of amendment 9, which would not limit the requirement to state funding but would provide for national standards, not just in the broad but restricted field defined by what the Minister helpfully read out a moment ago, but more widely.

[Rob Marris]

I think that that would be better for confidence, better for our economy and better for the people—many of whom will be young—who will acquire those qualifications. I therefore ask the Minister to think again.

A similar issue is raised by amendments 18 to 21, which relate to the involvement of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. They, too, seem to me to relate to the ability of employers and prospective apprentices—and, in the case of young apprentices, their families—to feel confident that the system will deliver a qualification that our country needs and that involves enough training to ensure that those apprentices are likely not only to end up with jobs but to contribute to society as we would like them to. That returns me to the workforce planning issue to which I adverted earlier.

The Minister and the Government ought to think again about those amendments. They may not want to accept the exact wording, but I should like them to include the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the list of agencies that will have a role to play in the planning, the maintenance and perhaps even the raising of standards. That would be desirable.

7.45 pm

**Justin Tomlinson** (North Swindon) (Con): I was a member of the Bill Committee, which was very constructive and involved much cross-party support. The Minister has a real passion for, and depth of knowledge about, this issue, and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden), also demonstrated a genuine interest.

I want to focus on a specific issue raised by the shadow Minister in connection with his desire to promote equality of opportunity. I think that that should include people with disabilities, and specifically those with learning disabilities. The Government have made great progress—they have helped some 600,000 more disabled people to obtain work in the last three years, which is fantastic—but those with learning disabilities still find it extremely difficult to benefit from the opportunities of work. The proportion is about 6%.

**Andrew Bingham** (High Peak) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for the work that he did as Minister for disabled people. Does he agree that we also need to help employers? Does not dealing with people with learning difficulties or mental health issues, about which the Prime Minister has talked today, require a great deal of support for the employer as well as the apprentice?

**Justin Tomlinson**: Absolutely. That is at the heart of the points that I am going to make. People need time to develop the necessary skills, and employers need to be able to provide suitable opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities. All Governments, in all generations, have tried their best to give opportunities to people with learning disabilities. The proportion has stayed rigidly at about 6%, which is the worst percentage involved in any disability and therefore presents us with the largest challenge.

When I was Minister for disabled people, I visited Foxes working hotel in Bridgwater. I was incredibly impressed by the fact that it had managed to get 80% of

its young students into work. Its three-year course involved two years in a working hotel, where the students learned how to acquire independent living skills and how to work towards obtaining jobs once they had finished. They were acquiring skills that were needed for their local towns, involving restaurants, hotels and care homes. We all have our own skills gaps in our constituencies, so the skills would be adapted accordingly.

The students spent their final year continuing their learning directly in the workplace. My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) mentioned employers. That final year gave employers an opportunity to receive support. Foxes academy provided training and advice for employers, and for the staff with whom they would be working. Young lads and ladies were able to learn their skills patiently over the year, which seemed to me to constitute an apprenticeship: they were learning skills on the job.

I invited the team to my Department. I said, “This is amazing: why can we not increase numbers?” I was told, “We could increase numbers, but that final year is so expensive, because we have to support the employer, that we have to cap them.” I think that if we could rebadge the system as an apprenticeship, we could access the funding that is being created through the apprenticeship levy, and bring about a huge number of additional opportunities. I met the then Minister for Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), who agreed with me, and we set up the Maynard review. I am delighted that the Government have accepted every one of its recommendations, and I pay tribute to both Mencap and Scope for the huge amount of proactive work that they did, as part of the review, in helping to shape real, tangible opportunities.

Having spoken personally to the Minister, I know of his passionate desire to see all that through. We touched on the issue in the Bill Committee, but let me urge him now to crack on with those pilots. Every young adult will seize the opportunities which—as I know, having met hundreds of young people with learning disabilities—they are desperate to be offered. I ask the Minister to continue to make this a priority, and, in his summing-up, to explain where we are, what is the timetable, and what more we can all do to raise the issue with local employers.

**Kelvin Hopkins**: It is a great pleasure to speak in this important debate. I, too, was a member of the Bill Committee, and I am somewhat disappointed that Government amendments have not been introduced at this stage reflecting some of the points made in Committee, especially as they seemed to be accepted at the time, in broad terms, by the Minister. I therefore hope that amendments will even now be brought forward in another place to reflect some of the discussions we had in Committee, and, indeed, some of the points made this evening, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) on the Front Bench, who made a tour de force speech introducing all his amendments. It is surprising that there are no Government amendments or new clauses on Report; that is very unusual.

All the amendments and new clauses have been introduced by my hon. Friend on behalf of the Labour Opposition—and they are all splendid and I support them all. The lack of Government amendments is disappointing, even though there is a degree of agreement

on the value of this legislation, and we all know we have to do something about improving apprenticeships and training our young people for the future. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris) said, we have to train our own rather than just poach people from abroad.

New clause 1, requiring the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education to report annually, is specifically about the outcomes of completed apprenticeships; it is about the quality of apprenticeships, not just other, broader measures of success. The quality of apprenticeships is vital, to ensure that they lead to the development of skills for quality, long-term jobs after their completion. Young people who complete their apprenticeships must be desirable to their own and to other employers; they must be able to command good jobs for the long term and to look forward to relatively high pay and advancement in those jobs. It is very important to make sure that apprenticeships are high quality not just in words, and that apprentices can do the things they are required to do after they have qualified.

I remember the days, many decades ago now, when we had full employment. I taught in further education during that era, and in many ways it was a better and happier period than we are in now. Everybody who wanted a job got a job, and teaching in further education was a sheer joy. It has been more painful and stressful since then, I have to say, and less well paid, and the conditions of employment are less good than when I was teaching. But that was several decades ago, back in the early 1970s. We also had large companies, mainly in the manufacturing sector, and the giant public utilities, which were then in public ownership, employing thousands of apprentices every year. They had to train their own and they wanted to make sure they were good. Some of those they trained moved off to other jobs, of course, but it was nevertheless beneficial to those doing the apprenticeships and to wider society.

Our society did well because we were training our own, but we have failed to do that in recent times; we have left things to the market, and the market does not always work well in these matters. A degree of Government intervention is required, and it is significant that the Prime Minister has used a phrase not used by any Government for a long time: she has talked about the need for an industrial strategy. I absolutely support that, and we had a debate on industrial strategy just a few weeks ago, which the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) led very well.

The subject we are discussing now is part of that industrial strategy. We have to train these people, to make sure we rebuild industry. We do not produce enough any longer, particularly in the manufacturing sector; we do well in services, but not in manufacturing. We have a gigantic trade deficit because we cannot produce enough and we have to buy in from abroad. We must rebuild the manufacturing sector, not so that it becomes the dominant force necessarily, but at least so that it produces sufficient to have a sensible trade balance, which we do not have at present.

Apprenticeships have always been insecure in recent times because companies are much smaller now than they were and they are less secure because of economic crises. I have many anecdotes from my own experience. Just after the 2008 crisis, I was being driven to Heathrow for a parliamentary visit and the driver had an

apprenticeship in the construction sector, but the company he had been with had collapsed and he finished up being a cab driver, which he could have done without doing an apprenticeship.

I have heard of fears, too, such as small companies training apprentices who are then poached by larger, more financially lucrative companies. That is particularly the case in the motor trade, where there are skilled small companies training their own people who are then poached by large companies that do lucrative insurance repair work, which can pay a lot more.

**Robert Halfon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for, yet again, making a thoughtful speech. I do not have the figures to hand, but the evidence suggests that apprentices in companies are more loyal to that company than those on any other training scheme or in work experience or doing early-career jobs, and that they tend to stay with the companies they do their apprenticeships in.

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I am sure the Minister is right in the majority of cases, but for some there is pressure to move on—for instance as a result of what is happening with house prices at the moment, as one can imagine. Certainly in Luton I know of companies, such as small motor repair firms, that employ apprentices who are under pressure to get a home, and if they can earn a few thousand pounds more at a larger company nearby to help them get on the housing ladder, they will do that. I agree that loyalty is important and many of them want to be loyal, but if the financial pressures on their lives are such that they have to move, they will in the end move.

I particularly want to support the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South about the need for a strategy for improving career education and new clause 4. We must ensure that when young people are at school or in further education they are aware of the enormous range of opportunities out there and they do not just look at a narrow field. In Luton too high a proportion of students want to get into the legal profession, for example; they want to be professionals and do not appreciate that there are highly paid, highly skilled jobs in manufacturing industry.

Vauxhall Motors still has a plant in Luton, and almost all its senior executives started as apprentices, leaving school, doing apprenticeships and going up the ladder, eventually doing higher qualifications such as higher national certificates and higher national diplomas and becoming highly paid senior executives in the company. Those opportunities are out there, and young people must be made aware of them. We must have a careers strategy making sure that every young person knows about all the thousands of different roles they could assume in life, rather than just going into the professions, or, indeed, just going into a local company; there are lots of things young people can do.

Life can be very exciting, and it is important that all of us do something we enjoy. I am very fortunate in that I was fascinated by politics in my early life and I finished up in Parliament where I wanted to be; I do not regret a moment of it. But sometimes people are not aware of the enormous range of possibilities in life. Having a powerful careers advice strategy is vital not just for young people's lives, but for the economy. If people are

[Kelvin Hopkins]

happy in their work, they will work better and the economy will work better, and the world will be a much better place.

I have one more story that explains something tragic that has happened in Luton. We were a town that trained thousands of apprentices, and I know many of them personally. Recently I visited a small manufacturing company that makes components for Formula 1 and Jaguar. It could not find one toolmaker; it wanted one toolmaker from a town of over 200,000 people that used to be dominated by manufacturing, but could not find one. It is a disgrace that we have failed to train sufficient numbers of people in these areas.

There are many other things I would like to say—I could speak for an hour unaided, I am sure—but as others want to contribute, I will leave it there. I hope the points I have made are of interest.

**Vernon Coaker:** I was not a member of the Committee, but I know that the Technical and Further Education Bill has generated a lot of really good debate and positive views on how we might achieve what we all want, which is an improvement in the technical and vocational education in this country and in apprenticeships. The fact that there is no division between us on that was illustrated by the contributions from the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden), among others.

8 pm

I want to set the Bill in context by referring to my earlier remarks to the Minister. Over decades, it has been the desire of every Government, whatever their colour, to enhance the status and esteem of apprenticeships and technical and vocational education. Our country has been bedevilled by a culture in which technical and vocational education are seen as second class in relation to academic qualifications. We all bemoan that fact—we say that it is wrong, and it is—but culturally, the situation has not moved on in the past 30 or 40 years.

I asked the Minister why this time would be different from all the other times, and I hope that what he says is right. I want him to be right. Every Minister—Conservative, Labour or whatever—will have had the passion and desire to say exactly what he has said. Speaking as a Labour Back Bencher, I say to him as a Conservative that I hope he is right and that this time it will be different. Our country's economy and its power are held back by the fact that things are not right at the moment. Our country is also held back by the fact that tens of thousands, if not millions, of our young people and families have not achieved what they should have done for this reason.

We talk about inequality of opportunity and the failure of many communities to advance and progress, and that is partly due to the fact that we do not value vocational education in the way that we should. It seems to me that challenging that is what the Bill Committee has been all about, and that is why I wanted to make this brief contribution to the debate tonight.

The depth of the problem can be illustrated by asking how we are to judge a good school. I cannot remember the last time anyone said, "I'm going to send my child

to that school because it is brilliant vocationally. The vocational qualifications and the way it trains people to be plumbers and builders are absolutely brilliant." My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) talked about the kind of skills needed at Vauxhall. Our defence industries are crying out for engineers to repair the ships and to do other highly skilled technical jobs. There are thousands of vacancies. When was the last time anyone said they were going to send their son or daughter to a school because they would end up in a first-class technical or vocational job? That does not happen, and that is a real challenge for us as a Parliament. It is a challenge for the Government, and it is a challenge for us as the Opposition to work with the Government to do something about this. I say this not as a criticism but as a challenge to us all.

I will tell hon. Members what I think, and the Minister and those on my own Front Bench might want to reflect on it. I genuinely believe that our country needs a national crusade on technical and vocational education. It needs something that will really shake the system up. We have a Minister and a shadow ministerial education team who are saying exactly the same things. Let us challenge our country to turn all this talk about the importance of skills and of technical education into a reality. If we could do that, we could improve our economy. Just as importantly, in addition to valuing our doctors and lawyers, who are really important, we would for the first time be giving the work and vocational education of many families the esteem that they deserve. Our country would be better for that. We would improve educationally, and many of our poorest communities—where equality of opportunity in education is a rhetorical myth rather than a reality—would actually be able to do something. What an achievement that would be for a Parliament, let alone for a Government. I wish the Minister well, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool South for his contribution. I also thank everyone on the Bill Committee for the contributions they have made towards tackling one of the most fundamental problems that our country faces. Good luck with it all.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): New clause 4 deals with careers education provision in technical and further education, and I want to build on the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris). As the Minister knows from our time spent together on the Bill Committee, this issue is of particular interest to me, and I would like to thank him for the courtesy that he has extended in explaining what the Department is doing in this area, and for introducing me to the Careers & Enterprise Company. I also thank him for his keen interest in improving careers education. After due consideration, however, I feel that the new clause is necessary and that it will complement the work that is already under way. There have been a lot of warm words and verbal support, but not including careers education provision in this legislation is an enormous missed opportunity.

The Bill will shake up the technical and further education sector considerably, and accepting the new clause would show how important career planning is to the House and to the Government. During private meetings before the Bill went into Committee, real concerns were raised with me about the lack of careers education provision in our colleges. It has been stressed that the

lack of advice available is such that, without explicit legislation on careers guidance, the matter will be nudged even further towards the back of the priorities queue. Resources in our colleges are overstretched, and I was disappointed to hear that in one institution a receptionist with no specialist qualifications or training had been asked to give careers guidance. The problem of a lack of careers guidance is stark. It has been brought to the attention of the Department by the co-Chairs of the Sub-Committee on Education, Skills and the Economy. In its report, the Sub-Committee states:

“Ministers appear to be burying their heads in the sand while careers guidance fails young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and exacerbates the country’s skills gap.”

It is clear that we cannot rely on warm words and reassurances alone. We must have provisions in writing and in legislation, because we have an obligation to our learners. As we know, the world of work that our young people are entering is changing really fast. The sector in which an apprentice starts their learning will have transformed enormously by the time they reach their last year. Access to guidance and advice should not be left behind when they step into a career. It should be more agile and responsive to the skills and experience they are picking up. It is those opportunities that new clause 4 would seize, including an opportunity for a strategy to be laid before the House that was specialised for further and technical education, that was ongoing, and that provided parity of esteem between technical, further and higher education, using the expertise of the new Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. This is a huge opportunity that is too good to miss.

**Gordon Marsden:** I thank all those who have spoken. I particularly thank the Minister for confirming that the implications of what we asked for in new clause 2 will be satisfied by the Government, which is an important concession or confirmation, depending on how he wishes to look at it. Whatever it is, we thank him for it.

I will withdraw new clause 1 but, as shown not least by the powerful speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and others, it is a huge missed opportunity that the Government are not including the strategy in the Bill. I mean no disrespect to the Minister and his personal qualities, but we believe that the strategy needs to be embodied for the foreseeable future in the Bill. On that basis, we will be pressing new clause 4 to a vote.

I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

*Clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

#### New Clause 4

##### CAREERS EDUCATION: DUTY TO PUBLISH STRATEGY

“(1) The Secretary of State shall publish a strategy for the purposes of improving careers education for persons receiving education or training—

- (a) in the course of an approved English apprenticeship;
- (b) for the purposes of an approved technical education qualification; or
- (c) for the purposes of approved steps towards occupational competence.

(2) The strategy shall be laid before Parliament.

(3) The strategy shall specify provisions under which the Secretary of State will seek to—

- (a) ensure that persons receiving education or training under subsection (1) receive information, advice and guidance relating to their future careers, and that such information, advice and guidance is delivered in a way which meets each person’s needs and is impartial;
- (b) ensure that such information, advice and guidance may be taken into account by relevant authorities and partners to meet the needs of local or combined authority areas;
- (c) ensure parity of esteem between technical, further and higher education; and
- (d) monitor the outcomes of such information, advice and guidance for recipients.

(4) The provisions specified in subsection (3) shall have specific regard to particular needs of different groups of persons receiving education or training under subsection (1), including—

- (a) persons with special educational needs;
- (b) care leavers;
- (c) persons of different ethnicities;
- (d) carers, carers of children, or young carers, as defined by the Care Act 2014; and
- (e) persons who have other particular needs that may be determined by the Secretary of State.

(5) The strategy shall include guidance for the purposes of improving careers education, to which the following bodies shall have regard—

- (a) the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills;
- (b) the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education; and
- (c) the Office for Students.

(6) The Secretary of State shall by regulations designate relevant authorities and partners for the purposes of subsection (3)(b).

(7) The Secretary of State may by regulations designate—

- (a) further groups of persons under subsection (4)(e); and
- (b) further national authorities or bodies under subsection (5).

(8) Regulations made under this section—

- (a) shall be made by statutory instrument; and
- (b) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament.

(9) For the purposes of this section, “careers education” means education about different careers and occupations and potential courses or qualifications to attain those careers and occupations.”  
—(*Gordon Marsden.*)

*This new clause would establish a statutory requirement for the Government to produce a strategy on careers education, which shall be taken to be the “Careers Strategy”.*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

*Question put, That the clause be read a Second time.*

*The House divided: Ayes 186, Noes 274.*

#### Division No. 115]

[8.10 pm

##### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie  
Alexander, Heidi  
Ali, Rushanara  
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena  
Anderson, Mr David  
Ashworth, Jonathan  
Beckett, rh Margaret  
Benn, rh Hilary  
Berger, Luciana  
Betts, Mr Clive  
Blenkinsop, Tom  
Blomfield, Paul

Brabin, Tracy  
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben  
Brennan, Kevin  
Brown, Lyn  
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas  
Buck, Ms Karen  
Burgon, Richard  
Cadbury, Ruth  
Campbell, rh Mr Alan  
Campbell, Mr Gregory  
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair  
Champion, Sarah

Chapman, Jenny  
 Coaker, Vernon  
 Cooper, Julie  
 Cooper, rh Yvette  
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy  
 Coyle, Neil  
 Crausby, Sir David  
 Creagh, Mary  
 Creasy, Stella  
 Cruddas, Jon  
 Cryer, John  
 Cunningham, Alex  
 Cunningham, Mr Jim  
 Dakin, Nic  
 David, Wayne  
 Davies, Geraint  
 De Piero, Gloria  
 Doughty, Stephen  
 Dowd, Peter  
 Dugher, Michael  
 Eagle, Ms Angela  
 Eagle, Maria  
 Efford, Clive  
 Elliott, Julie  
 Ellman, Mrs Louise  
 Elmore, Chris  
 Esterson, Bill  
 Evans, Chris  
 Farrelly, Paul  
 Farron, Tim  
 Field, rh Frank  
 Fitzpatrick, Jim  
 Ffello, Robert  
 Fletcher, Colleen  
 Flint, rh Caroline  
 Flynn, Paul  
 Fovargue, Yvonne  
 Foxcroft, Vicky  
 Furniss, Gill  
 Gapes, Mike  
 Gardiner, Barry  
 Glass, Pat  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma

Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morden, Jessica  
 Mulholland, Greg  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Simpson, David  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen

Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Williams, Mr Mark

Wilson, Phil  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

#### Tellers for the Ayes:

**Jeff Smith and  
 Thangam Debbonaire**

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Sir Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, Conor  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Davis, rh Mr David  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon

Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert

Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Osborne, rh Mr George  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Wharton, James

Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggin, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob

Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Graham Stuart and**  
**Mark Spencer**

*Question accordingly negated.*

#### Clause 14

##### OBJECTIVE OF EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

**Gordon Marsden:** I beg to move amendment 1, page 8, line 4, at end add—

“(3) Before an education administrator may perform functions specified in subsection (2), they must ensure an appropriate assessment is made and published of the impact of performing such functions, including, but not restricted, to—

- (a) the impact on the quality of education provided to existing students of the further education body;
- (b) the capacity of another body or institution to undertake any additional functions or provide education to additional students;
- (c) the infrastructure of the local area, in particular transport;
- (d) the ability of students to travel to another body or institution; and
- (e) any financial impact on those students, including the cost of travel by students to attend another body or institution, and steps to mitigate those impacts.

(4) The Secretary of State shall make regulations to specify suitable bodies for making the assessments at subsection (3).

(5) Regulations made under subsection (4)—

- (a) shall be made by statutory instrument; and
- (b) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.”

*This amendment would ensure that an appropriate assessment is made of any potential impacts on students and their education, if an education administrator puts a further education body into “special administration” and takes action such as transferring students to another institution or keeps an insolvent institution open for existing students. This amendment would also require the Secretary of State to specify suitable bodies to perform such assessments.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

Amendment 2, in clause 18, page 9, line 15, at end insert—

“(e) suspend the Office for Students protection action for students.”

*This amendment would give the court the power to suspend Office for Students’ student protection action for the period of insolvency in which the education administrator has responsibility for the management of an FE body .*

Amendment 3, in clause 28, page 13, line 2, at end insert—

“(1A) Sums guaranteed under subsection (1) shall include statutory pension obligations payable to staff employed by a further education body subject to an education administration order.”

*This amendment would ensure that staff employed by an FE college continue to accrue statutory Teachers Pension Scheme and Local Government Pension Scheme pension obligations? during an education administration.*

[Mr Deputy Speaker]

Amendment 22, in schedule 2, page 30, line 39, at end insert—

“3A The education administrator may not transfer assets of any further education body to a for-profit private company where he or she considers that more than half of the funding of the acquisition of the asset came from public funds.”

*This amendment would ensure further education bodies with a track record of accruing assets publicly, could not be transferred to a for-profit private company.*

**Gordon Marsden:** May I wish you a happy new year, Mr Deputy Speaker?

We turn to the extremely important part of the Bill, which is one of the reasons why the Bill is in the form it is. I shall deal with that in a moment or two when discussing amendments 2 and 3. First, I wish to focus on the importance of clause 14 and of the Government’s welcome introduction into the Bill of the role of the education administrator. Although we welcome that, we want to probe, as we did in Committee, just how it is going to work in practice, and that is the purpose of amendment 1. It is extremely important to remember the end product we are all aiming at. We hope—and I believe, as I am sure the Minister does—that the number of occasions when the detailed insolvency provisions laid out in the second part of the Bill will be required will be as few as possible. Shortly, I will suggest why I think they are particularly necessary and deal with some of the related issues.

This amendment would ensure that an appropriate assessment is made of any potential impact on students and their education if an education administrator puts a further education body into special administration and takes action such as transferring students to another institution or keeps an insolvent institution open for existing students. It would also require the Secretary of State to specify suitable bodies to perform such assessments. The amendment has been tabled at the urging of the National Society of Apprentices and it touches on an area where the Minister and I have common ground: the importance of understanding what the end product of this new education administrator is all about. He or she is there to provide protections and support that would not be available in a traditional insolvency process. That is extremely important in terms of the position of young people, particularly those who might be at college as part of their apprenticeship or of other training.

I wish to speak particularly to the proposed new subsections 3(c), 3(d) and 3(e) set out in our amendment. One thing that the NSOA’s research has shown—this was in 2014 and the figure may well have increased since—is that apprentices spend, on average, about £24 a week on travel, which equates to a quarter of the salary of an apprentice earning the apprentice national minimum wage. Additional research has indicated that some young people were choosing the apprenticeships they could afford to get to, rather than those they were keen to do. In the light of the area review process in England and the creation of fewer, more resilient colleges, we are concerned about the impact on those potential apprentices in terms of their travel time between provider, employer and home. We have had our disagreements with the Government over that review process and will doubtless continue to probe them strongly on it.

The Opposition believe it is important that the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education takes a clear and early lead role in encouraging local authorities and transport companies to ensure that all young people, including apprentices, are covered by travel concessions. Without a high-profile champion for their needs, apprentices can too often be excluded from such concessions, because apprenticeships are perceived as employment rather than education and are excluded from the relevant definitions. The crux of the amendment is to ensure that the entitlement that the Bill gives to students to continue their education works in practice. The ambitions of the provisions on special administration are noble; the amendment is intended to be a safeguard against any unintended consequences.

8.30 pm

The education administrator will be given four options for supporting students to continue their education if their college becomes insolvent. As discussed in Committee, the options are: a provision to sell assets to keep a college afloat; a provision to bring in another body to take on different functions of the college; a provision to transfer students to another college; and, finally, in slightly ambiguous wording, a provision to keep the college “going until existing students” can finish their courses. Those are all sensible options, and I do not think that anyone present would suggest that they should not be pursued by the education administrator should students’ education be put in jeopardy by insolvency. However, I have tabled the amendment to explore what they would actually mean and to propose an assessment of the impact of the decision on students and the local community. We hope that, through such an assessment, any negative effects could be mitigated appropriately.

I shall give some brief examples. If an administrator keeps a college going for existing students to finish, it would be entirely understandable, and possibly probable, that lecturers and staff at the college might look to leave. The involvement of an education administrator would essentially be a sign of a failed college, and the taking of that option would mean that their employer would be closing in the near future anyway. Any exodus of staff in such circumstances could have untold effects on the quality of education the students received. So we want to know from the Minister—as would students, I am sure—what transitional measures would be put in place to protect the quality of education being received in a college that was being kept open only on life support.

Should the administrator decide to begin to sell off college assets to deal with insolvency issues, what protections will there be so that resources that are integral to a learner’s studies will not be sold off? Computers spring to mind as possible attractive assets that could be sold quickly for a good taking, but selling them off could leave even fewer resources to share between the remaining students of the college and have a negative impact on their experience.

What about circumstances in which students need to be transferred to another college? How close to their homes and their old college would the new college be? How much more expensive would it be to get them there? College attendees spend a lot of money on travel, the cost of which is already risking making education inaccessible for the less well off. What financial support

might be available to help them to access education at the new institution if the costs were considerably higher? Would the new college have the capacity to respond to an influx of new students?

Because of insolvency, some students could find themselves forced to travel longer distances, but there is no reference in the Bill to how they would be compensated. As I have said previously, mergers between colleges could be particularly harmful to the social fabric, and to the mobility of young people in rural and suburban areas. The implications for their being able to maintain their courses, which are, after all, the liability of the colleges, will be significant if issues such as travel are not considered.

When giving evidence to the Bill Committee, the new Further Education Commissioner said that

“provision at levels 1 and 2, in particular, needs to be as local as you can get it to the learners, whether in an urban or rural area.”—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee*, 22 November 2016; c. 27, Q35.]

He accepted that if people do not have the money to travel, they will not be able to do so.

Shakira Martin of the National Union of Students also gave evidence. She said:

“It is also not clear how the Government will make sure that the education the student receives in the college is kept open and to a high-quality standard.”

Bev Robinson, the principal and chief executive of my local college, Blackpool and The Fylde College, and part of Lord Sainsbury’s panel, said she

“would wish to make sure that learning within a reasonable travel-to-learn pattern was protected as well as students.”—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee*, 22 November 2016; c. 51, Q69 and 70.]

I see nothing in the Bill, and little has been said by Ministers, about where the funding to support the process will come from.

Research released in 2015 by the NUS and the Association of Colleges showed that only 49% of FE students—virtually half—could always afford their travel costs. The average travel time for those surveyed was two hours and 48 minutes a day, with an average distance of 11 miles. Four in 10 young people were relying on financial support from parents or guardians for travel costs. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of a national funding scheme. Even the minority of councils that offered discount travel to young people are unlikely to do so now following continuing Government cuts. This amendment would at least require that such things be considered, so that appropriate measures could be put in place.

**Rob Marris:** My hon. Friend is much more familiar with the Bill than I am. On the clarity that he seeks to introduce by this amendment, does he share my concern—perhaps he does not, because he knows the Bill better—that it is not clear in the Bill what an education administrator is? I know that he or she will be an officer of the court and that they will carry out certain functions. Training is central to what we are talking about on the Bill, yet I cannot see anything that says there has to be certain qualifications for an education administrator. It is a bit fuzzy.

**Gordon Marsden:** As usual, my hon. Friend is perceptive. If we had the time and if it was within the scope of this amendment, I would acquaint him with the debates in

Committee during which we discussed that matter at some length. Although we have not moved any more specific amendments in that area—obviously, this is something for the other place—the Minister needs to reflect further on what, if anything, needs to be put in the Bill to answer perfectly legitimate and important questions such as the one my hon. Friend has just asked.

There are a number of effects that the invocation of these education administration powers may have on students, but that is precisely the point of the amendment: to ensure that whatever impacts these powers have in practice, they are assessed within the local circumstances of the colleges in which those changes are needed.

Let me turn now to amendment 2, with which I hope the Minister will have some sympathy. Again, if he not happy with its structure, perhaps we can juggle with it. The amendment would give the court the power to suspend student protection action by the office for students for the period of insolvency in which the education administrator has responsibility for the management of an FE body.

The Association of Colleges is particularly keen to see amendment 2 addressed. It is concerned that the insolvency regime is being introduced at the same time as a separate protection regime takes place in higher education under the control of the new office for students—that Bill has entered its Committee stage in the other place only today. We have some sympathy with its belief that the Government have missed an opportunity to introduce a joint legal regime, covering both further and higher education corporations. However, we are where we are, and that is the basis on which this proposal is being put tonight, so this Bill needs to be amended to remove duplication between the HE intervention regime and the FE regime. This affects colleges that want to maintain or develop their HE provision, which is an important part of the system and which involves up to 150,000 students. I feel strongly about this because it affects my local college, Blackpool and the Fylde College, which has up to 1,000 students.

We have two Government Bills creating two separate control systems with two sets of obligations on colleges. Ministers will say that special administration and the OFS powers will be used only in exceptional cases, but, inevitably, colleges will have to prepare for the worst. If they have higher education provision, they will need to boilerplate—double insulate—their finances to satisfy the organisations with which they deal. This could make it a lot more expensive to run HE provision than it needs to be. The purpose of the amendment is to confirm that the OFS regime will be suspended during a special administration.

I wish to speak briefly to amendment 3, which addresses the need to ensure that staff who are employed by an FE college continue to accrue statutory teachers’ pension scheme and local government pension scheme obligations during an education administration. This issue has been raised not just by the Association of Colleges, but by the University and College Union. Colleges employ large numbers of staff and not all of them are teachers. In addition to caretakers, catering staff and cleaners, they employ learning support assistants, IT technicians and administrators. On Second Reading, we made a point of emphasising that, just as with universities, it is not simply teachers, administrators and bureaucrats

[Gordon Marsden]

who keep these institutions going. The same is true of FE colleges. We would be appalled if, as a result of any of these issues, people's pension rights or their potential pension rights were affected.

We believe that there are more than 70,000 people in colleges who are not teachers and who are eligible in law to membership of the local government pension scheme. There is some evidence that the Bill has raised concern among those running local government pension schemes and that it is already resulting in additional financial demands on colleges. We do not think that it is the Government's intention to use the process to renege on debts to the LGPS, because that would simply pass on the costs to all the other employers, including councils themselves, but colleges have no choice in law about whether to offer LGPS membership. The fact is that they do provide access to decent pensions for 70,000 people, and the purpose of the amendment is simply to clarify that staff employed by an FE college continue to accrue those obligations and that the Government will ensure that any additional debt accrued is covered. That would ensure that statutory TPS and LGPS pension obligations are suspended but that employed staff can continue to accrue entitlements, but that that does not result in penalty interest, which is written into TPS and LGPS rules once they recommence.

In case the Minister thinks that this is only a hypothetical issue, it is worth making the point—the UCU has done so—that there are already real concerns about pension scheme deficits in certain colleges, and that the regulation, if the issue is not addressed, could cause alarm with lenders and raise interest rates, which could of course negate the stated aim for the introduction of insolvency regulations and preclude the increased confidence in the insolvency scenario that the Government and we are very keen to see.

**Rob Marris:** May I assure my hon. Friend that the Minister is well aware of that scenario, because my local college, the City of Wolverhampton College, has a big pension problem, and when I have discussed it with him he has been extremely helpful in trying to resolve it?

**Gordon Marsden:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he has provided a specific example of precisely the issue that has led us to table the amendment.

Amendment 22—I give notice that we will be pressing it to a vote—would ensure that further education bodies with a track record of accruing assets publicly could not be transferred to a for-profit private company. We had a significant discussion about that in Committee. For the benefit of those who were not in Committee, and indeed those who were, I will try to summarise it as briefly as possible, because I think that the principle is extraordinarily important.

The current situation raises some significant questions about what would happen to the transfer of assets. The information states that assets should be transferred only to charitable bodies, and it is on that point that I wish to focus my remarks. Where the bodies are not charities, assets must be transferred in accordance with the charitable purpose of the trust. It then links to a list

of prescribed bodies to which assets could be transferred, including sixth-form colleges and governing bodies. The point that I am making is that it is expected that all transfers should be made to charitable bodies, but that is not the same as saying that that is required.

When colleges were incorporated in 1992, it took them formally outside the aegis of local authorities. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) spoke eloquently about that in Committee. We have to take into account that the asset base in many cases was built up with local authority support and funding over 20 or 30 years. I reminded the Minister in Committee about my own local college, Blackpool and the Fylde College, which he has visited. He went to the Bispham campus, which has buildings and elements that go right back to the 1950s and '60s. When the Building Colleges for the Future process took place in 2000, we did not get the new college that we hoped we would for a variety of reasons to do with where we were in the food chain. Nevertheless, I am illustrating that the estates of many buildings we are talking about have been accrued either on an active financial basis or by the ceding of land by local authorities and other organisations.

8.45 pm

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a particular issue in higher value areas, where it may be tempting to build some more flats on public land that should actually be used for the common good?

**Gordon Marsden:** My hon. Friend has a double qualification to speak on the subject: as the Member of Parliament for the constituency she represents and through her previous career as a distinguished local government leader in London. She knows whereof she speaks and she is absolutely right that the problem is accentuated in those areas.

Money has come in over the years including pre-1992 and in the major Building Colleges for the Future programme that the Labour Government introduced in the 2000s. Then, of course, significant sums of money were put in by regional development agencies and sometimes through regional growth fund developments and offshoots of European structural funding. As I said, FE colleges deliver not just FE, but higher education. If 10% to 12% of total HE provision is being delivered by FE colleges, it is really important that we do not lose that position.

I do not want to rehearse—indeed, we do not have time to tonight—the arguments that were made in 2011 about the private for-profit sector training coming in and being involved with various equity funds whose investment platforms were very much focused on a broad area. However, I would say, as many in the sector would, that although the private equity funding sector can be extremely profitable and useful, it is based on a relatively short-term view of providing management and initial capital to buy other companies and then taking them off the public share markets. It is entirely reasonable for us to be concerned about the possible disposal of lands with significant amounts of public assets. The question is not simply whether it is a good thing to transfer a significant number of public sector

assets to a private provider, but what the financial guarantees are. More importantly, there are issues regarding the nature of the body and the guarantees to the students and the people employed there if such organisations use the insolvency to take on those colleges.

Ministers may talk about guarantees for staff under TUPE, but I am sure that hon. Members realise that TUPE does not offer protection forever and a day. I have had significant experience of that in my constituency in Blackpool over the years with people who have been outsourced from the civil service and TUPE-ed into other organisations that have then passed on to someone else, at which point those people's automatic rights and security of tenure have almost become extinguished. Those are our concerns and they are not irrelevant. They are concerns of pragmatics and of principle. It is not as though there have not been concerns in the area previously.

In December 2014, the Public Accounts Committee severely quizzed officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which then had responsibility for the matter, about why private providers were allowed to engage in untrammelled expansion without proper quality checks. In February 2015, the Committee published a report that said that BIS has repeatedly ignored advice from the Higher Education Funding Council for England about vast sums of public money going to for-profit colleges without due process and consideration. There is the potential, as Martin Doel, the former chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said, for private organisations to

“asset strip colleges' buildings and facilities”  
or “pick” assets.

So, for the avoidance of doubt, we are not saying that we would oppose any private sector takeover of a college in any circumstances; we are saying that the education administrator will have to make a judgment. We are also saying that, without the protection in this amendment, the potential for the things I have described to happen would be very high, and that is why we are determined to press the amendment this evening.

**Robert Halfon:** I thank the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) again for his amendments. I will begin by discussing amendment 1, which affects clause 14. I have to stress that, in the unlikely event that an FE body becomes insolvent, we want to ensure that any disruption to students' studies is avoided or minimised as far as possible. It will be for the education administrator to deal with that, and according to the relevant clause in the Bill, they will be an insolvency practitioner—they are likely to come from one of the bigger companies and to have education experience. It will be the same system as with insolvent companies.

The education administrator will decide how the special objective will best be achieved. Clause 14(2) does no more than suggest ways in which that might be done. The education administrator will need to consider the specific circumstances of any insolvency and then determine the most appropriate approach. It is inconceivable that they would draw up proposals for achieving the special objective without having had discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, such as the Further Education Commissioner, student bodies and others, and without considering a wide range of pertinent issues.

Our expectation is that that will include discussions with the key stakeholders, local authorities and others. Where appropriate, it may also involve—I brought this up in Committee—a conversation with the care leaver's personal adviser. We discussed in Committee the additional personal and pastoral support that care leavers might need. I undertook to consider the matter further, and I hope the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) will be pleased that we are keeping the promise we made in Committee. We will ensure that the guidance to local authorities on their corporate parenting responsibilities, being introduced through the Children and Social Work Bill, includes advice on the role of personal advisers in the event of a college insolvency affecting a young person for whom they are responsible.

We expect the education administrator, in developing their proposals, to take account of the quality of alternative provision and, if it is necessary for students to complete their studies in other locations, to consider the impact of travel distances. The hon. Member for Blackpool South will be aware that we provide funding to colleges to support disadvantaged and vulnerable young people. In addition to the disadvantage funding for post-16 places—£550 million in 2016-17—which can be used to subsidise college buses, there is also the 16-to-19 bursary fund and the fund for the particularly vulnerable. Colleges will be able to offer this funding to eligible students who transfer to them under a special administrative regime. There may be scope for the education administrator to set up a scheme to cover some or all of the additional travel costs if students do have to travel to another location.

In Committee, the hon. Gentleman said:

“We do not want this to become”

a

“long-winded, time-consuming process”—[*Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee*, 1 December 2016; c. 174.]

I share that view. It is in the interests of students and staff to have certainty as soon as possible about what will happen. Requiring formal assessments to be carried out in the way proposed by the amendment would lengthen the process and reduce the education administrator's discretion to find the best way of achieving the special objective. That is not to say that we do not agree that these issues are important, but I have shown that they are at the front of the education administrator's mind.

On amendment 2, I understand the issue about double protection and why the hon. Gentleman has tabled the amendment. The amendment is unnecessary because the court, on hearing an education administration application, already has the discretion to make any interim order it thinks appropriate. If it is necessary or appropriate to make an order relating to an existing student protection plan, the court has the power to do that under the Bill.

On pensions, we have followed as far as possible the provisions of the ordinary administration regime that exists for company insolvencies. We propose to adopt similar provisions for college insolvencies, which, as I say, will be very rare indeed. As with any administration, once the administrator has adopted the employment contracts of the staff they decide to keep on, they are personally liable for the costs of those individuals, such as their salary and their pension contributions. They would take

[Robert Halfon]

on the appointment only if they were confident that sufficient funds were available to meet the costs. Some pension contributions will continue to be made and benefits accrue. Some staff may be made redundant, whether at the start of the education administration or subsequently, but this will of course be in accordance with statutory employment rights. For these staff, contributions to the pension fund will end once they are no longer employed by the body, but this is no different from the position of any other person leaving their employer's pension scheme. It is important to be clear, however, that the benefits individuals have accrued in the scheme prior to the end of their employment will not be lost.

I accept that the hon. Gentleman feels very strongly about the transfer issue. FE colleges are statutory corporations with very significant freedoms to deal with their own assets. A solvent college is free to transfer property to any person or organisation it chooses. In order to benefit, the college would of course expect to receive value when transferring an asset to a third party, and in general this would mean transferring at market value, although this depends on the nature of the transaction as a whole. In this case, however, we are talking only about a situation where a college has failed financially and is insolvent—an extreme case.

I need to make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that there are four vital protections that act as a quadruple lock to safeguard assets that belong to the college, which may well have been paid for with money from the public purse but have to be dealt with because the college is insolvent. First, unlike solvent, operational colleges that wish to transfer property, if the education administrator decides to make a transfer scheme, they are restricted as to whom they can transfer the assets. These bodies are prescribed in the secondary legislation made under section 27B of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. They are public sector bodies with educational functions. In addition, transfers can be made to private companies, but the company must be established for purposes that include the provision of educational facilities.

Secondly, just as with any other action of the education administrator, any transfer scheme must be for the purposes of achieving the special objective of avoiding or minimising disruption to students' studies. Thirdly, creditors have a general right to challenge should they consider that the education administrator is selling things "on the cheap", for example. Finally, the Secretary of State or Welsh Ministers must approve the proposed transfer scheme. Any approval will include, among other matters, consideration of whether it is for the purposes of achieving the special objective. I believe that the quadruple lock answers the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his amendments, and thank other hon. Members for their contributions to the debate. I hope that my response has reassured him, and the House, on his underlying concerns. I therefore ask that the amendments are not pressed to a Division.

**Gordon Marsden:** I have listened carefully to what the Minister has said and taken note of his views and the proposals he has made. On that basis, we are prepared to withdraw amendment 1.

On amendments 2 and 3, I heard the reassurances that the Minister has given, but when the Bill reaches the other place there needs to be a further examination of the very important issues around the pension schemes. I am not entirely convinced that the assurances, which I am sure have been made in good faith, will actually do the business.

As regards amendment 22, I thank the Minister for his explanation of what he described as the quadruple lock, but I am afraid, not least because of seeing past practice, that we have to plan in this Bill not for the best circumstances but for the worst. This is also a really important issue of public policy that we should establish within the Bill. On that basis, we wish to press amendment 22 to a vote. I beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment 1.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Schedule 2

### EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION: TRANSFER SCHEMES

*Amendment proposed: 22, page 30, line 39, at end insert—*

"3A The education administrator may not transfer assets of any further education body to a for-profit private company where he or she considers that more than half of the funding of the acquisition of the asset came from public funds."—(*Gordon Marsden.*)

*This amendment would ensure further education bodies with a track record of accruing assets publicly, could not be transferred to a for-profit private company.*

*Question put, That the amendment be made.*

*The House divided: Ayes 183, Noes 278.*

**Division No. 116]**

**[8.59 pm**

### AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Cryer, John
Alexander, Heidi	Cunningham, Alex
Ali, Rushanara	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena	Dakin, Nic
Anderson, Mr David	David, Wayne
Ashworth, Jonathan	Davies, Geraint
Benn, rh Hilary	De Piero, Gloria
Berger, Luciana	Doughty, Stephen
Betts, Mr Clive	Dowd, Peter
Blenkinsop, Tom	Dugher, Michael
Blomfield, Paul	Eagle, Ms Angela
Brabin, Tracy	Eagle, Maria
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Efford, Clive
Brennan, Kevin	Elliott, Julie
Brown, Lyn	Elliott, Tom
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Buck, Ms Karen	Elmore, Chris
Burgon, Richard	Esterson, Bill
Cadbury, Ruth	Evans, Chris
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Farrelly, Paul
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Farron, Tim
Champion, Sarah	Field, rh Frank
Chapman, Jenny	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Coaker, Vernon	Flelo, Robert
Cooper, Julie	Fletcher, Colleen
Cooper, rh Yvette	Flint, rh Caroline
Coyle, Neil	Flynn, Paul
Crausby, Sir David	Fovargue, Yvonne
Creagh, Mary	Foxcroft, Vicky
Creasy, Stella	Furniss, Gill
Cruddas, Jon	Gapes, Mike

Gardiner, Barry  
 Glass, Pat  
 Godsiff, Mr Roger  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Haigh, Louise  
 Hamilton, Fabian  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Jones, Gerald  
 Jones, Helen  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lamb, rh Norman  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Caroline  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, rh John  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahon, Jim  
 Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morden, Jessica

Mulholland, Greg  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Olney, Sarah  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Phillipson, Bridget  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reeves, Rachel  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Ryan, rh Joan  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Sherriff, Paula  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Spellar, rh Mr John  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Trickett, Jon  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 West, Catherine  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

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

#### NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allan, Lucy  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart

Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett

Barclay, Stephen  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bebb, Guto  
 Bellingham, Sir Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackman, Bob  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Sir Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, rh Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Courts, Robert  
 Cox, Mr Geoffrey  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinenage, Caroline  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Ellwood, Mr Tobias  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Eustice, George  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Sir Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Field, rh Mark  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike

Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, rh Mr David  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, rh Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harper, rh Mr Mark  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, rh Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkins, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Dr Caroline  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kirby, Simon  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, rh Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leigh, Sir Edward  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Sir Oliver  
 Lewis, rh Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Lidington, rh Mr David  
 Lopresti, Jack  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, David  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Newton, Sarah  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen  
 Pawsey, Mark  
 Penning, rh Mike  
 Penrose, John  
 Percy, Andrew  
 Perry, Claire  
 Philp, Chris  
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric  
 Pincher, Christopher  
 Pow, Rebecca  
 Prentis, Victoria  
 Prisk, Mr Mark  
 Pritchard, Mark  
 Pursglove, Tom  
 Quin, Jeremy  
 Quince, Will  
 Raab, Mr Dominic  
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob  
 Robertson, Mr Laurence  
 Robinson, Gavin  
 Robinson, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, David  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Smith, Royston  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Dame Caroline  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Stewart, Rory  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond  
 Swire, rh Sir Hugo  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Wharton, James  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Whittaker, Craig  
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John  
 Wiggan, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wilson, Sammy  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
**Mark Spencer and**  
**Graham Stuart**

*Question accordingly negated.*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I will now suspend the House for no more than five minutes in order to make a decision on certification. The Division bells will be rung two minutes before the House resumes. Following my certification, the Government will table

the appropriate consent motions, copies of which will be shortly available in the Vote Office and will be distributed by the Doorkeepers.

9.16 pm

*On resuming—*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I can now inform the House of my decision about certification. For the purposes of Standing Order No. 83L(2), I have certified clauses 2 to 38 of, and schedules 2 to 4 to, the Technical and Further Education Bill as relating exclusively to England and Wales and within devolved legislative competence, and clause 1 of, and schedule 1 to, the Bill as relating exclusively to England and within devolved legislative competence. Copies of my certificate are available in the Vote Office.

Under Standing Order No. 83M, consent motions are therefore required for the Bill to proceed. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motions?

**Robert Halfon** *indicated assent.*

*The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).*

[MR LINDSAY HOYLE *in the Chair*]

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I remind hon. Members that if there are Divisions, only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion for England and Wales, and only Members representing constituencies in England may vote on the consent motion for England. As the knife has fallen, there can be no debate

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83M(5)),*

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses of the Technical and Further Education Bill:

*Clauses certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and Wales and being within devolved legislative competence*

Clauses 2 to 38 of, and Schedules 2 to 4 to, the Technical and Further Education Bill.—(*Robert Halfon.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England) (Standing Order No. 83M(4)(d)).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83M(4)(d)),*

That the Committee consents to the following certified clauses of the Technical and Further Education Bill:

*Clauses certified under Standing Order No. 83L(2) as relating exclusively to England and being within devolved legislative competence*

Clause 1 of, and schedule 1 to, the Technical and Further Education Bill.—(*Robert Halfon.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decisions of the Committees (Standing Order No. 83M(6)).*

*The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decisions reported.*

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sure that the House was greatly entertained by the farce that we

have just witnessed. I hope that during the adjournment, you had the opportunity to take advantage of the facilities here and even make yourself a nice cup of tea, Mr Deputy Speaker, because it was a completely and utterly pointless waste of time.

Because of the way in which the programme motion has been designed and because of the lack of time available, it has not been possible for the Legislative Grand Committee to consider all these important English-only measures. Given that English votes for English laws is supposed to be of paramount importance and one of the main innovations of this Parliament, is it not disappointing that English Members have not had the opportunity to lend an English—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I think the hon. Gentleman and I both know, first, that that is not a point of order and, secondly, that an important debate took place today, and it was regarded as important to have a special debate on health as well. The fact is, however, that time has gone. The House agreed to the rules and they have now been applied. Going over all that is not going to change anything. I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the point of order and he has now put his point on the record. The bottom line is, however, that these are the rules that the House has chosen, as he well knows. That is the end of it. We move on to Third Reading. Perhaps time for a cup of tea. *[Interruption.]* Order. If you have a problem, Mr Wishart, you should pursue it through the usual and proper channels. The fact is that you did not raise a point of order, as you well know. I know it was not a point of order and you know it was not, which was why you raised it. The bottom line is this: if you do not like it, go and get your cup of tea while the House gets on with the business.

### Third Reading

9.21 pm

**Robert Halfon:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I want to give my special thanks to all the individuals who have shared their time and knowledge during the Bill's passage through the House, to the officials who have worked so hard to bring it before Parliament and to those providing written and oral evidence. I would like to thank members of the Committee for their diligent approach and careful consideration of the practical implications of the Bill, and Members who have already spoken today.

I am clear about the priorities that we want to see in apprenticeships, further education and skills, creating a ladder of opportunity for all. These include a transformation of prestige and culture; widespread, high-quality provision; a system that addresses our skills needs; social justice; and job security and prosperity. The Bill seeks to build those priorities into our system, bringing to life the fundamental reforms needed to ensure that we have a skills and education system that rivals the best in the world.

For too long, technical education has been overly complex, overlooked and undervalued. Putting employers at the heart of these changes, as demonstrated through the current apprenticeship reforms and as recommended

by Lord Sainsbury's independent report, we can provide a clear route to employment for our young people. The changes in the Bill will support the achievements of those young people from difficult backgrounds, such as those with special educational needs or disability. In response to what my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) said earlier, we are doing a lot to implement the Maynard reforms, we are spending £2 million to help apprentices with mental health difficulties, and we announced over Christmas that apprentices with severe hearing problems will be able to do sign language instead of English as a functional skill.

We expect individuals with SEND to be over-represented on technical education routes: 23% of those who access technical education routes will have some form of special educational need compared with 7% of those taking level 3 academic qualifications, and 20% of those in the cohort as a whole.

The measures in the Bill will drive up the productivity of our country, turning us into an apprenticeship nation and providing the skills we need for our country to thrive. That is why the CBI has said:

"Businesses have long called for a vocational route...so today's proposals are a real step forward."

**David Rutley:** I thank my right hon. Friend for the incredible work he has done in taking the Bill forward and I commend him for his efforts. Does he agree that one of the most important factors is engaging businesses in these apprenticeships and making the route to skills more relevant for business so that this will not only help to address the productivity challenges that he has mentioned, but improve life chances for the young people involved, too?

**Robert Halfon:** My hon. Friend, whom I thank for his work on the Committee, is absolutely right. We introduced the apprenticeship levy to change behaviour and involve businesses in supporting apprenticeships, we have created the institute and the employer panels, and we are giving huge financial incentives to businesses, especially small businesses, to ensure that they hire apprentices.

The Bill also introduces an insolvency regime for the further education sector that will, in the unlikely event of a college insolvency, provide clear-cut protections for learners to minimise disruption to their studies as far as possible, while offering certainty to creditors. During oral evidence, we heard from representatives of the Association of Colleges, Collab and others, who supported the insolvency regime and the protections that it includes for learners. Although there were issues about which the banks had questions, many spoke in support of the clarity provided by the proposed measures. Santander told us that it was keen to lend more to the further education sector, and said:

"On the Bill and the proposed insolvency regime, we are actually supportive of the clarity that they provide."—*[Official Report, Technical and Further Education Public Bill Committee, 22 November 2016; c. 38, Q41.]*

**Kelvin Hopkins:** As the Minister will remember, I suggested in Committee that all colleges should have professionally qualified members with financial skills in both management and governorship, so that skilled eyes would be trained on the finances to ensure that at least mistakes were not made internally.

**Robert Halfon:** I accept the hon. Gentleman's premise, but, as I think I said in Committee, I do not want to put a straitjacket on colleges. The principal of Blackpool and The Fylde College acknowledged that there might be different requirements for different colleges. Nevertheless, there should be as much financial expertise as possible in further education colleges. When there is real financial leadership, those colleges will always be in good financial health whatever the funding pressures.

We forecast that, by March 2017, we will have spent a total of about £140 million on propping up colleges facing extreme financial difficulties. That money should have been spent on education and training priorities. While we envisage that only a very small number of colleges will ever find themselves insolvent, providing protection for learners and clarity for creditors is a crucial part of what we are trying to do, and of our responsibility to support the sector.

Since the Committee stage, we have been in a position to publish for consultation the Secretary of State's draft strategic guidance. Following our conversations about the importance of incorporating the views of students in the running of the institute, it will come as no surprise that the guidance sets out our firm expectation that the institute will establish an apprentice panel by April this year. The panel will report directly to the board, ensuring that the learner voice—the apprentice voice—is at the heart of the institute. I am glad that the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) is encouraged by our approach. We also intend to publish for consultation, before the institute becomes operational in April, an operational plan for the institute which will set out in more detail how it intends to carry out its functions.

As for the insolvency elements of the Bill, we discussed in Committee the protections given to students through the special objective, and the possible ways in which the education administrator could ensure that disruption to students' studies was avoided or minimised. In particular, we discussed whether the particular regard that the education administrator must have to the needs of students with special educational needs and disabilities should be extended to any other groups. I also recognise the importance of taking account of the needs of care leavers, recognising that they may need additional personal or pastoral support to deal with any uncertainty or upheaval should their college ever be subject to insolvency. Such support is best provided for each individual by a local authority-assigned personal adviser. As I said earlier, we will take steps to ensure that the guidance being produced for local authorities on their corporate parenting responsibilities includes advice on the role of personal advisers in the event that the young people for whom they are responsible attend colleges that enter education administration.

There is much to be proud of in our current system, given that 71% of FE colleges are good or outstanding and more than 50% are in good financial health, the proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds in education or taking up apprenticeships is at a record high, the reforms made following the 2011 Wolf review have raised the quality of qualifications, and 88% of students were recorded as having a sustained education destination in the year after key stage 5.

We know that high-quality further education can have a truly transformative impact on young people. That is why we announced as part of the spending

review that we will protect the 16-to-19 national base rate of £4,000 per student for the duration of this Parliament. By 2020, if we include the adult education budget, the 19-plus apprenticeship funding and advanced learner loans, more funding will be available to support adult further education participation than at any time in England's history.

The measures in this Bill will build on the key priorities, enabling students to make better choices about their future, with the opportunity to gain qualifications valued by employers that will secure their future prosperity and that of our nation.

**Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con):** In my constituency we are very fortunate in having Richard Huish sixth-form college, which has just been shortlisted as one of the six best sixth-form colleges in the country for *The Times* award. It runs apprenticeship courses, but there are concerns that it cannot get enough students to apply for some of the business admin courses. There is a real demand from business for those students, yet there are loads of apprentices doing courses where business does not really have jobs for them. Does the Minister agree with me and the principal of the college that provisions in this Bill to develop the synergy between education, apprenticeships and business are welcome, and indeed vital in addressing the skills shortage in this country?

**Robert Halfon:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention, and she is absolutely right: everything this Government are doing—the apprenticeship levy, this Bill, FE and technical education reform, the drive up of standards, the encouragement of apprenticeships, the money we are putting in with £2.5 billion that will be doubled by 2020—is designed to solve the problems she has talked about.

The OECD has said about the skills plan that “the UK has a promising plan to advance technical education from a last resort to a first choice.”

Colleges, too, have spoken highly of the plan, including the principal of my own Harlow College, who said:

“As colleges we are not just about courses, we are about careers—we therefore believe that any reform that brings us closer to employers means our students gain higher skills and better jobs.”

This Bill is a Ronseal Bill: it does what it says on the tin. It transforms the prestige and quality of apprenticeships and technical education in our country, addresses the skills deficit, protects students in the event that colleges face extreme financial difficulty, and ensures that the most disadvantaged are able to climb the ladder of opportunity. The Bill underlines the Prime Minister's commitment to a country that works for everyone. I commend the Bill to the House.

9.32 pm

**Gordon Marsden:** May I associate myself with the Minister's comments in thanking the officials and all Committee members? I particularly thank my Labour colleagues, who did sterling work in supporting us on the Front Bench in Committee. May I also commend the support that the Public Bill Committee gave to us? The role of the Opposition in challenging the Government on these matters is sometimes equivalent to that of David taking on Goliath; we do manage occasionally to get a few slingshots in, and I am grateful on this occasion they have not incapacitated the Minister concerned.

This is an important Bill with some important provisions, which is why we have not opposed it on Second Reading or on Third Reading tonight. However, that does not mean that we do not continue to have profound concerns about its implementation, process and progress. That was indicated in the excellent, although relatively truncated, debate we had on the amendments, in the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Wolverhampton South West (Rob Marris), for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), who is still here, for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), who gave an inspiring speech on the need for us to have vocational passions, and for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin), a relatively new Member of the House. All of them talked about practical issues such as implementation, about which we still have real concerns. This is not just a matter of formulae. For a long time—indeed, until it was almost too late—there were no links between higher education and further education in the way envisaged when the previous higher and further education legislation was brought forward.

I ask the Minister to reflect on a matter that is perhaps even more important. We have had a spirited discussion today about whether we need to have a strategy for careers advice in the Bill. We still believe that we do, and we think the Minister has missed a trick in that respect. The inclusion of such a strategy would have entrenched his position and his passion for careers advice, rather than diminishing it. The broader issue, however, is that the things that the Minister and everyone else would like to see happen are not solely a matter for the Department for Education. I know that he is as passionate about delivering traineeships as I am, but to do that we need to build structures and links between the DFE and the Department for Work and Pensions and to reach a concordance over the 16-hour law and other things. If the Government want to deliver careers advice, there will need to be a similar engagement and balancing act between the DWP and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. These things cannot just be left in one particular box.

I pay tribute to the Minister for the passion that he has shown on apprenticeships, but the fact is that apprentices are still handicapped by a number of things on which the Government have yet to prove their bona fides. That includes issues relating to GCSEs in English and maths. I have heard encouraging words on that from the Secretary of State and the Minister, but they have not yet nailed that issue down and it will not go away unless there is a satisfactory solution to the often soul-destroying requirement to retake GCSEs in those subjects.

Apprentices do not work and exist in a vacuum. The question of how their families are supported—through child benefit and in other ways—needs to be looked at, not just by the Department for Education but by other Departments as well. If that does not happen, there will be a real problem. Our new clause on this matter was ruled not to be within the scope of the Bill, but this is still a really important issue.

Mention was made in passing of devolution. I do not want to go into that issue much further tonight, but the Government need to think very clearly about it. They are going ahead with the devo-max process for combined authorities, yet the structures in the Bill do not reflect the reality of what the delivery of adult education, and possibly apprenticeships, will be like. Personally, I do not think that we can have a proper long-term skills

strategy on a localised basis without taking apprenticeships into account as well as adult education. That point has not been addressed in the Bill.

The Minister has talked about insolvencies, and I associate myself with his view that it is a minority issue in regard to further education colleges. Let us pray that it continues to be so. However, it is worth remembering that the Bill is being introduced in the context of a period of profound funding cuts in the FE sector. The Government need to address the fact that that is the context in which they have decided to introduce this standalone Technical and Further Education Bill. The Minister also mentioned travel support. I note in passing that if the Government had taken up our proposals on education maintenance allowance, the process might perhaps have been speedier.

I want to return to the question of how the provisions will be delivered, and the timescale involved. It is three months until the apprenticeship levy funding kicks in. We still do not know who the new chief executive of the institute will be, and we do not know about the board. We have had some progress on those issues today, but we are told, for example, that the Skills Funding Agency will stay in charge of the new register of apprenticeships, which raises genuine bewilderment among many people out there—the Minister will have seen the comments made to *FE Week* in the past couple of days on this subject—as to why it is not Ofqual, if not IFATE, that is administering the register of approved apprenticeship assessment organisations. Is the real reason why the SFA is doing this because it is basically the civil service and that it would give a reserve power to Ministers to micromanage? It is not a question of what the Minister might do but what some of his successors might do.

Those important issues will need to be reflected on in the other place. Two key issues still remain. Will the funding and the staffing numbers that were dragged out of the Government when Peter Lauener spoke to the Committee be adequate for all the responsibilities? I would say that it is doubtful at this stage. How arm's length or genuinely independent of judgment will the new institute be, or will Whitehall still be micromanaging the strings? Those are not just petty issues. They are issues that, if not resolved properly, will not gain the full-hearted consent of stakeholders, providers and all the people whom the Minister needs, and we all need, in order to meet the targets and to make his aspirations and my aspirations for apprenticeships for the next generation a reality.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.*

## **Business without Debate**

### **EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENT**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),*

#### **TAXATION: A COMMON CONSOLIDATED CORPORATE TAX BASE**

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 13730/16 and Addenda 1 to 3, a Proposal for a Council Directive on a Common Corporate Tax Base; further takes note of European Union Document No. 13731/16 and Addenda 1 to 3, a Proposal for a Council Directive on a Common Consolidated

Corporate Tax Base; considers that the proposals do not comply with the principle of subsidiarity for the reasons set out in the Twenty-third Report of the European Scrutiny Committee (HC 71-xxi); regrets that because of the inflexibility of the deadline for providing a Reasoned Opinion over the Christmas period it has not proved possible in the time available for the House to serve a Reasoned Opinion in accordance with Article 6 of Protocol No. 2 annexed to the EU Treaties on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality; and instructs the Clerk of the House to forward this motion and the Reasoned Opinion recommended by the European Scrutiny Committee to the European Commission by way of political dialogue.—(Christopher Pincher.)

*Question agreed to.*

## Sixth-form Education: International Comparisons

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(Christopher Pincher.)

9.41 pm

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I pay tribute to all those working in sixth-form education for the fantastic work they do on behalf of our young people and our country. I particularly praise the two excellent colleges, North Lindsey and John Leggott, that serve young people in north Lincolnshire. Having led John Leggott as principal before being elected to this House, I know the importance of this phase of education in transforming life opportunities. I also know that, since I stood down as principal, the challenges facing those who lead colleges has been immense. Three direct cuts were imposed on 16 to 18 funding in the last Parliament, whereas five to 16 funding was protected. On top of that 13.6% real-terms cut, colleges now face a further 8% erosion of the current national funding rate over the remainder of this Parliament due to inflation. There are further pressures from increased employer pension and national insurance costs.

The average funding per student in the sixth forms of schools and academies and in sixth-form colleges is now £4,583, which is 20% less than the funding received to educate each 11 to 16-year-old and 47% less than the average university tuition fee of £8,636 per student. How, in all logic, can it be so much cheaper to educate a 16 to 18-year-old than a 15-year-old or a 19-year-old?

The Government claim that they have

“provided sufficient funds for every full-time student to do a full timetable of courses”.

But they have not published any research on the sufficiency of the funding provided to educate 16 to 18-year-olds. In short, the Government do not know how much it costs

“to do a full timetable of courses”.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. With his track record, he is the right person to be leading it. I suspect like many colleagues, I will be mentioning my college, Lowestoft College, but does he agree that sixth-form colleges such as Lowestoft are the underfunded, unsung heroes of the British education system and that, with the right resources, they can play a key role in addressing this country’s productivity gap?

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Gentleman is right to praise Lowestoft College, which, like many colleges in the country, does a fantastic job on behalf of the young people it educates. He is also right to say that these colleges need to be properly funded to ensure they continue to do that good job into the future.

In reality, the national funding rate—currently £4,000 for 16 and 17-year-olds and £3,300 for 18-year-olds—is calculated by taking the settlement arrived at between the Department for Education and the Treasury, and dividing it by the number of students in the 16 to 18 age group. It is no more sophisticated than that. In the independent sector, sixth-form fees are higher than secondary fees to reflect the actual cost of delivery for this age group.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend accept the remarkable statistic that sixth-form colleges outperform all other 16 to 19 forms of institution across the country, as has been recorded by the Sixth Form Colleges Association in its wonderful manifesto?

**Nic Dakin:** I thank my hon. Friend for rightly highlighting the high level of performance that sixth-form colleges deliver. He does a fantastic job as a governor of Luton Sixth-Form College and as chair of the all-party group on sixth-form colleges.

There is now a significant gap between the funding made available to educate sixth formers and the actual cost of delivering the rounded, high-quality curriculum we would all want to see well into the future.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing this debate. I, too, have a highly acclaimed sixth-form college in my constituency, Richard Huish College. It has just been shortlisted for *The Times Educational Supplement* top sixth form awards, and I hope it might win—potentially beating Lowestoft College. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that with the budgetary cuts we have seen the enrichment courses—art, drama and sport—being dropped from many sixth-form colleges? It is often in such areas that the students who might not excel academically could excel. Might there not be a potential knock-on effect on mental health—everybody is talking about that—and spikes in young people's mental health if we do not enable them to do these much more rounded courses, which are so beneficial?

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Lady is right to highlight the fact that certain elements of the curriculum are under threat when there is such pressure on funding. Enrichment activities, including those that address mental health issues, are one of the many activities that have been under threat over the past six years. The dramatic collapse in funding does have an inevitable impact on the education that 16 to 18-year-olds receive. As someone who has managed resources in a sixth-form college, I know that there are only a small number of variables to play with when facing significant funding cuts, as the sector has since 2010. Alongside the usual good management things relating to the back office, procurement, charges, efficiencies and so on, there are a limited number of options: shrink the curriculum offer; increase the teaching staff contact time; reduce student contact time; and increase class sizes. In reality, all those things have to be done to make things hang together.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Gentleman is making an incredibly powerful case. On the issue of underfunding, does he agree that sixth-form colleges are uniquely cruelly treated, because unlike schools and academies they cannot cross-subsidise from the more generous funding available for younger students in schools and they do not receive a VAT reimbursement? So not only are they the most efficient, with the best track record on delivery, but they are the most underfunded section of the higher education area.

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Lady is right to point out the performance of sixth-form colleges and the pressure on their funding. Of course the funding situation for 16 to 18 education is not just affecting sixth-form colleges—it is affecting school sixth forms and academy sixth forms, too. It is affecting all 16 to 18 experience.

Since 2010, the programmes of study followed by students have altered in those typical ways I outlined. Back then, most level 3 students followed a curriculum of four advanced courses in year 1, plus general studies, enrichment and tutorial. They progressed on to three or four courses in year 2, plus enrichment and tutorial. In most cases, as the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) pointed out, the enrichment has gone, the tutorial has shrunk significantly, general studies has largely disappeared and the number of advanced level courses taken is now normally three in both years. That leads to significantly lower student contact time. I know from experience that there is a direct correlation between contact time and achievement, particularly for students who have struggled to achieve at 16.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): I thank my north Lincolnshire neighbour for giving way and congratulate him on securing this debate. On the point he just made, he will know that his neighbouring constituencies in north and north-east Lincolnshire are coastal communities, so have particular problems with social mobility. Does he share my hope that when he responds the Minister will indicate the Government's continuing support for sixth-form colleges such as Franklin College in Grimsby?

**Nic Dakin:** I thank my constituency neighbour for his contribution. Franklin College is, of course, a high-performing, well-regarded sixth-form college, as are all four Humber sixth-form colleges—Wyke College, Wilberforce College and, of course, John Leggott College in Scunthorpe. I am sure the Minister is listening carefully. He is a very good Minister and I am sure he is going to give us all hope for a rosy future when he speaks later in the debate.

The impact of the changes on students has been significant. The Sixth Form Colleges Association's 2016 funding impact survey shows that sixth-form college education is an increasingly narrow and part-time experience. Two thirds of sixth-form colleges have already dropped courses as a result of funding cuts and cost increases. Some 39% have dropped courses in modern foreign languages, and the vast majority have reduced or removed the extracurricular activities available to students, including music, drama, sport and languages. Worryingly, 64% do not believe that the funding they will receive next year will be sufficient to support students who are educationally or economically disadvantaged—the very point made by my neighbour, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers).

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Franklin College in my constituency has already been mentioned. It has experienced significant funding cuts, to the point where it has lost around £1 million per year, resulting in a reduction in the courses offered. Does my hon. Friend think that that will also have an impact if students want to choose a variety of higher education courses to further their education beyond A-level?

**Nic Dakin:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is an inevitable impact on the progression into higher education, particularly for courses such as modern foreign languages, as well as, rather worryingly, certain aspects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses.

[*Nic Dakin*]

Today, 15 to 17 hours of weekly tuition and support has become the norm for sixth-form students in England, but that would be considered part-time study in most national education systems. Research commissioned by the Sixth Form Colleges Association from the Institute of Education describes sixth-form education in England as “uniquely narrow and short” compared with the model adopted in Shanghai, Singapore, Sweden and elsewhere.

In Shanghai, the upper secondary curriculum is based on eight fundamental subjects: Chinese, mathematics, English, science, thoughts and politics, society, arts and physical education. In addition, there are extended subjects and activities that allow for greater specialisation or for new or collective forms of learning. Finally, there are research-based subjects that take two hours per week. Overall, there is a total of 35 lessons per week, plus an extra hour per day for meetings and physical exercise. Lower and upper secondary education offer broadly the same number of lessons per week, and students receive at least 30 hours of tuition per week.

**Jason McCartney** (Colne Valley) (Con): I rise to speak as one of the vice-chairmen of the all-party group on sixth-form colleges. I am proud to have Greenhead College and Huddersfield New College in my neck of the woods. I went to both their awards evenings last week. Greenhead College was celebrating 60 of its students getting their Duke of Edinburgh gold award, while 85% of New College students went on to university and academically it is in the top 10% nationally. Nevertheless, as we have heard there are huge funding challenges. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the conclusions of this debate should be that we have a review of funding so that it really does tackle the realistic costs of providing a well-rounded range of subjects so that we can compete internationally?

**Nic Dakin:** I very much welcome the hon. Gentleman’s comments. He is absolutely on the money—literally and metaphorically. The Minister needs to review the funding and to check that we are appropriately resourcing that well-rounded education that we all want to see. The reason for making these international comparatives is to say, “Well this is what is being invested in other high performing systems.” If we want to compete effectively with those high-performing systems, we need to be willing to look at what we are doing in a self-critical way and to set out our stall accordingly. I am sure that that is what the Minister will want to do when he comes to speak later on in the debate.

In Singapore, the upper secondary curriculum is based on core examination subjects, elective examination subjects and compulsory non-examination subjects. The core examination subjects are studied for around eight hours a week. Students choose three to four elective subjects and study each for around four to six hours a week. Compulsory non-examination subjects—assembly, physical education and character development—take up to four hours a week. Students receive between 27 hours’ tuition and support for those taking three elective subjects and 32 hours for those taking four. The duration of study is either two or three years.

Let us make a European comparison. In Sweden, where I worked for a number of years, upper secondary education is structured primarily through three-year

national programmes. Each programme covers a series of foundation subjects—English, history, physical education and health, mathematics, science studies, social studies, Swedish and religion. In addition, a number of subjects specific to a given programme are chosen. Students receive around 19 hours of tuition a week, but, crucially, this entitlement is for three years rather than two.

The Institute of Education concludes its report by describing the English model as “low hours and short duration.”

Students in other leading education systems receive more tuition time, study more subjects, and in some cases benefit from a three-year programme of study rather than a two-year programme.

**Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this subject to the House. In fact, the issue has been raised in my constituency by the principal of Barton Peveril, who has talked about the problems relating to enrichment, the narrowing of education, efficiency and cross-funding, which are at the heart of our children’s education, and of course about the impact internationally. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the Government were to look at this matter, there would be an impact on our universities? I am talking about them having to pick up the pieces of our narrow education if we are to compete internationally.

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. In some ways, she reinforces the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn).

As I said, the Institute of Education describes the English model as “low hours and short duration.”

By contrast with their peers elsewhere in the world, students in England receive around half as much tuition time and are following a three-subject diet. In addition, the funding cut for 18-year-old students has created a financial disincentive for schools and colleges to offer young people a third year to complete their sixth-form studies—and these are the very young people who need the additional support and additional time.

The Institute of Education contrasted the narrowing of the curriculum in England when students reach the sixth form compared with the model adopted by our international competitors. It said that

“unlike other national systems where the amount of tuition actually increases in upper secondary education when compared with the lower secondary phase, the English experience is the opposite. The sharp reduction in the number of subjects studied post-16 (an average of four subjects, now reducing to three) compared with pre-16 (10+ GCSEs or vocational equivalent) appears to represent sudden movement to a part-time curriculum.”

Bizarrely, despite these huge pressures on mainstream 16 to 18-year-olds, the Government have, since 2010, been able to spend money on unproven, untested and different types of provision for 16 to 18-year-olds. That is money that could have been spent on mainstream students. It has been unwise indulgence in political peccadillos at a time when there is contraction in both the population and the budgets.

Some 169 new academy and maintained sixth forms were opened between 2010 and 2015, but the total number of enrolled school students has been static. Average cohort sizes were already small and have declined further. Curiously, the Department for Education offers

little in the way of practical advice to make school sixth forms work and has not researched the effectiveness of the reforms that have brought in so many smaller sixth forms.

10 pm

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).*

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Christopher Pincher.)*

**Nic Dakin:** In March 2016, Ministers introduced five new tests to ensure that new sixth forms are viable, which I welcome, but that was a limited step because it does not cover sixth forms that are already open. There is now a long tail of small institutions, with 1,180 school sixth forms enrolling fewer than 100 students. There is emerging evidence that some of their performance is not quite what we would wish it to be.

Meanwhile, university technical colleges have struggled to achieve viability in a system currently built around exams and transfer at age 16. As a result, six have closed and one did not open as planned. A sensible policy from the Department for Education would be to review sixth forms that are particularly small or underperforming, in the interests of value for money at a time when money is short.

**Jonathan Reynolds** (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): May I add to the adulation that my hon. Friend is rightly receiving for his speech tonight? I cannot help mentioning Ashton Sixth Form College, which is just outside my constituency—it is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), who is sitting on the Front Bench. Does he agree that one of the strange bits of Government policy, as I understand it, is that where demand does exist for more sixth-form provision, that can be met only through the creation of school, academy or free school sixth-form provision? That seems very strange, given the credit that has rightly been given to the sixth-form sector by Members on both sides of the House this evening.

**Nic Dakin:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Minister is listening carefully and will obviously take that point on board, along with the other points that hon. Members have made.

I would like to conclude by posing a few questions to the Minister. Why are sixth-formers in England funded to receive only half the tuition time and support available to sixth-formers in Shanghai, Singapore and other leading education systems? Why are sixth-formers in England facing a standard diet of just three advanced-level subjects, while those in other international systems can study eight or nine?

It is good to have a Secretary of State who was educated in the comprehensive system and who attended a comprehensive sixth-form college—it is a first that I very much welcome. She will be well aware that 744,000 16 to 18-year-olds choose to study in colleges, while 433,000 choose to study in schools. All are affected by the squeeze in funding for their age group. Will she therefore move away from funding sixth-formers based on an arbitrary funding rate and conduct a review of funding to ensure that it is linked to a realistic cost of delivering a rounded, high-quality curriculum? Will she agree to work with the Sixth Form Colleges Association,

the Association of Colleges and the Association of School and College Leaders in conducting the review, building on the current evidence base?

Finally, in the state sector, education funding decreases at the age of 16 to an average of £4,583 per student, per year. In the independent sector, school fees increase at the age of 16 to an average of £15,333 per student, per year. What does the Minister think are the implications of that for social mobility? On the day when the Prime Minister has made an important speech on the matter, it sounds to me like the sort of everyday injustice that she would be keen to tackle in her desire to build a shared society.

10.4 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Mr Nick Gibb):** May I start by adding to House's adulation of the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) and congratulate him on securing the debate? Ensuring high-quality post-16 education is a priority for the Government and for the country. We recognise the contribution of the dedicated staff working in all types of post-16 education and the hard work of students. In fact, a record proportion of young people are now participating in education, training or apprenticeships. I can give my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) the assurance that the Government support sixth-form colleges, including the sixth-form college mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney) and Franklin College in Grimsby.

Education and training in England is widely respected around the world, but we are determined to make further improvements to ensure that 16 to 19-year-olds are ready for the demands of the workplace by moving directly into skilled employment or by continuing to higher education. We are therefore reforming academic and technical education for over-16s and we are learning from the best international systems.

All countries that we look to learn from have a stage of education that no longer exclusively takes place in school. At this stage, there are options for students to gain relevant experience to prepare them for work either through apprenticeships or technical education, as we heard in the previous debate, or to prepare for further academic study at university. The way that works and the age at which it starts varies considerably around the world. For example, in countries such as Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, there is a high level of investment by employers in vocational training in the secondary phase and an early emphasis on workplace training. That leads to lower rates of young people who are not in education, employment or training than in England, but the difference in academic standards between pupils from different socioeconomic backgrounds in those countries is larger than in England.

By contrast, only about one fifth of 15 to 19-year-olds in countries such as Japan and Korea are enrolled in vocational upper-secondary programmes. The remaining 80% of those cohorts continue a rigorous academic programme. It is useful to benchmark ourselves—if “to benchmark” is a new verb—against such countries to understand the strengths and weaknesses of our education system and to raise our expectations of what students here can achieve. That is why I am determined that we should improve our maths teaching by learning from

[Mr Nick Gibb]

the high-performing Asian systems such as those in Shanghai, Singapore and Japan by adopting maths mastery through the maths hubs programme, but it is not simply a case of choosing one country to learn from. Our priority should be making our whole system world class.

There is much to be proud of in comparing our education system to other countries. For example, England's 15-year-olds continue to perform significantly above the OECD average in science and, in 2015, England's 15-year-olds performed above average in reading for the first time. However, our performance in maths remains at the OECD average and a survey of adult skills identified our 16 to 18-year-olds as having the weakest literacy and numeracy skills out of 18 countries in 2012. We need to take action to deal with areas of poor performance. In the case of literacy and numeracy, we have now made the continued study of English and maths in post-16 education and training compulsory for students who did not achieve a good GCSE pass at age 16. More broadly, we are reforming both academic and technical education.

International examples of programme hours are widely used, but those comparisons need to be carefully interpreted. It is important that we understand what the estimates include, how programmes of longer duration or higher intensity are funded and how they sit beside other routes for young people to take from school to work. It is not always clear in the various studies where work experience is included in the figures. Certainly in the planned hours used to benchmark our own programmes for funding, we do not include self-directed study or homework, which is a key part of this phase of education. It is important that we develop a system that serves our pupils and our economy.

In England, we have an established academic route for sixth-form students through well-respected A-level qualifications. It is true that our system requires pupils to make choices and therefore, to a certain extent, to specialise in a smaller number of subjects for the sixth-form stage, but some degree of specialisation is a feature of systems in other countries as well. Through the A-level route, our academic system at post-16 is effective in preparing pupils for successful futures through in-depth study of the subjects they choose. We have some of the best universities in the world, and the proportion of English students studying in higher education is now larger than it has ever been. That includes the highest ever entry rate for the most disadvantaged 18-year-olds.

Of course, we are not standing still, and we are strengthening the design of A-levels to make sure that pupils continue to be fully equipped for the future. We have given higher education providers a leading role in redesigning a number of key A-levels, to ensure that pupils who take these qualifications are prepared for undergraduate-level study. We have also redesigned the assessment model, increasing the time available for high-quality teaching rather than taking exams.

Where we have not matched our neighbours is in technical education, where we have a major programme of reform under way. The landmark review of vocational education for 14 to 19-year-olds conducted by Professor Alison Wolf in 2011 found that at least 350,000 16 to 19-year-olds were working towards vocational qualifications

that offered no clear progression routes. The review led to the introduction of new study programmes and of per-student funding instead of per-qualification funding to ensure fair funding for FE colleges in line with other 16-to-19 institutions. As a direct result of the recommendations in the Wolf report, we now include only approved qualifications in performance tables. This means that young people can have confidence that their qualifications will enable them to progress to further study or into employment.

However, we recognise that the system is still not doing enough to support students who wish to pursue technical education. We recognise that we are still not matching the most effective systems of technical education in other European economies. That is why, following publication of the Sainsbury review, we are embarking on a radical reform of England's post-16 technical education system. Learning from the best technical education systems overseas, we are working to introduce new technical routes that will enable young people to gain the knowledge and skills required for work, according to standards designed in partnership with employers. Bringing training for young people and adults in line with the needs of business and industry will support increases in productivity, which has lagged behind, even as economic growth and employment levels have improved. It will also help to ensure that young people and adults can move into sustained and skilled careers that lead to prosperity and security.

Alongside that, we are continuing the reform of apprenticeships, as we have heard. We are increasing the quality of apprenticeships through more rigorous assessment and grading at the end of the apprenticeship. We are also giving employers control of the funding so they become more demanding customers. We are committed to reaching 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020.

**Caroline Lucas:** I genuinely very much welcome the Minister's support for the sixth-form sector and sixth-form colleges, but he has been speaking for nearly 10 minutes and has said nothing about the arbitrary funding that has been the focus of so much of the concern expressed on both sides of the House. Will he commit to look at this funding issue? Will the Government look at how much funding is required for the rounded curriculum that sixth-form colleges want to deliver? Colleges in my constituency, such as Varndean College and Brighton, Hove & Sussex Sixth Form College, are desperate to deliver it but are being undermined by the lack of funding, which the Minister still has not really addressed.

**Mr Gibb:** If only the hon. Lady had waited just two more seconds, we would have come to that pivotal part of my response to the debate.

Clearly, the right level of funding needs to be in place to match our ambitious academic and technical reforms. In 2013, investment in education in the UK as a whole—combining public and private sources—was above the OECD average across all phases, including post-16. We have made the system more coherent so that school sixth forms and colleges are all funded and have their performance reported in the same way. Funding is on a per-student basis, giving schools and colleges the freedom to design the best programmes for their students, rather than rewarding institutions for providing large numbers of small qualifications that have little value.

**Lucy Powell** (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that all institutions are treated the same, but free schools, in particular, were outwith the area reviews of provision that we have just seen undertaken in many parts of the country. Is he aware of Connell Sixth Form College in my constituency, which was opened by a grammar school and has recently received a “requires improvement” Ofsted rating? That sixth-form college is operating below the numbers required to sustain it, and it was outwith the area review. Does he think that is a good use of public funds in the context of this debate?

**Mr Gibb:** Area reviews can take schools into account, but 2,000 or more schools have sixth forms, and if we were to bring them all into the area reviews, that would make the whole system unmanageable. The free school system was introduced to challenge the status quo in terms of sixth forms and in terms of schools themselves, because in the past we have had monopoly provision of new schools. The free school movement has been phenomenal in opening up sixth forms such as King’s College London Mathematics School, where 100% of youngsters are getting A or A\* grades in maths A-level, and Exeter Mathematics School. These schools are challenging the status quo in these areas and providing a very high-quality education. We need to see more of those innovative and demanding free sixth-form schools that open up for young people opportunities that they would not otherwise have had.

**Nic Dakin:** I have been listening to the Minister very carefully. Does he accept that the research available demonstrates that since 2010 the funding for 16 to 18-year-olds has been reduced in real terms, and that the impact of that has been to reduce the level of tuition time to 13 to 17 hours per student? I am interested in whether he recognises that as an issue, and if so, whether he sees it as a problem.

**Mr Gibb:** I absolutely recognise that resources are tight for 16-to-19 education and training. In recent years, we have had to make some post-16 savings while working hard to sustain funding levels for schools, bearing in mind the fact that success in school pre-16 is the best predictor of outcomes in post-16 education.

We have made clear commitments to 16-to-19 education, where we have protected the base rate of funding at £4,000 per student for all types of providers until 2020.

This was announced in the 2015 spending review, at a time when public finances are under great pressure. Providers receive additional funding for students taking part in more expensive programmes, and there is also a large programme uplift for providers who have pupils studying four or more A-levels, provided they achieve minimum grade requirements, and about £540 million of funding is allocated each year to enable schools and colleges to give extra support to disadvantaged students. That is essential in helping those from poorer backgrounds or those who, pre-16, have not attained well enough to get the help they need to succeed.

Overall, we plan to invest about £7 billion during 2016-17—taking apprenticeships together with other education and training options—to ensure that there is a place in education or training for every 16 to 19-year-old who wants one. This commitment means that all types of providers are funded for 600 planned hours per year per full-time student. That level of funding supports a significant programme of study. For example, it will allow for three A-levels and 50 hours of tutorials, plus either one AS-level or about 150 hours of enrichment or work experience. While we have not been able to protect budgets for sixth-form education in real terms, there is funding to ensure that every sixth-form age student has the opportunity to undertake high-quality study that will help them to move on to skilled work or further or higher education.

Our commitment to the post-16 sector has contributed to the current record-high proportion of 16 to 18-year-olds in education, training or apprenticeships, and the lowest proportion of young people not in education, employment or training since consistent records began in 1994. Applications to higher education from 18-year-olds are at an all-time high.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Scunthorpe for raising this important issue. I recognise that there is more to do to continue improving our post-16 education system to ensure it is established as one of the world’s best, but we should be proud of the achievements so far and recognise that we are building a system that is both affordable and in keeping with our country’s needs.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.20 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Monday 9 January 2017

## CABINET OFFICE

### “Securing the ballot”: Government Response

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chris Skidmore):** The Government have published their response to “Securing the ballot”, the review of electoral fraud conducted and published by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) in August 2016. I would like to thank my right hon. Friend for the work involved in his comprehensive and detailed report, which the Government believe is an important step in our commitment to tackling all types of electoral fraud in the UK. I add my thanks to all those individuals and organisations who contributed to this important review.

The Government have given each of My right hon. Friend’s 50 recommendations careful consideration. In setting out the Government’s view on each of the recommendations in turn, the response presents a package for reform that will ensure we can build a democracy that is clear and secure. We intend to achieve the changes we propose through a combination of primary and secondary legislation, where parliamentary time allows, and through new or reinforced guidance. As a central part of the reform package, the Government will look to identify legislative opportunities to give electoral administrators greater powers to protect voters from intimidation and undue influence, and to end the dubious practice of postal vote harvesting by political parties.

We will also look to introduce a number of pilot schemes at local government elections in 2018 to trial the use of voter identification in polling stations. The Government agree with my right hon. Friend that asking voters to prove their identity before receiving their ballot paper may be an effective way to enhance the security of the democratic process. Using existing legislative provisions, we will invite those local authorities identified by the Electoral Commission as being at risk of electoral fraud to take part in pilots, as well as authorities who are not considered at risk. The pilots will enable the Government to assess the impact of voter identification on elections in the UK.

The Government are aware of the consequences of devolution for this programme of reform. As with all legislation that relates to the division of competence on electoral matters between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations, we are clear that decisions on these changes are ultimately the responsibility of those Administrations. We will consult with the Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish Administrations to ensure that there is an effective and consistent fit for any changes brought forward.

The response presents a challenging programme of reform, which we will work hard to implement over the coming years. The Government will continue to work closely with the devolved Administrations and with interested organisations to ensure that we can provide a democracy that works for everyone.

Copies of the response will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS396]

## HEALTH

### Mental Health

**The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):** I would like to update the House following today’s announcement made by the Prime Minister about this Government’s plans to reform mental health services in this country.

For too long those suffering mental illness in England have experienced a hidden injustice. Mental illness has been shrouded in stigma and the needs of those with mental health problems have been neglected compared to those with physical illness. An estimated one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem at any one time and the economic and social cost of mental illness is estimated to be £105 billion a year. Left unaddressed, mental illness can destroy lives, cause untold pain to families and prevent people from fulfilling their potential at work, school or in society.

This Government are determined to address the historic failure—over successive generations and Governments—to tackle mental illness. We are grateful to the Independent Mental Health Taskforce for publishing the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health last year, which set out a clear roadmap for the NHS, our arm’s length bodies and Government. In February, the Department for Health supported their recommendations with an additional investment of £1 billion per year by 2020. NHS England accepted the recommendations for the National Health Service in full and have published an implementation plan. Today the Prime Minister announced that the Government accept all the recommendations made to it by the Independent Taskforce on Mental Health and are publishing an update on our progress against these recommendations. The Government’s response to the Mental Health Taskforce can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-01-09/HCWS397>.

But we must go further still. The challenge of mental illness is growing and we must all—at every stage of life and every level in society—take steps to tackle it.

First, because we know that children and young people are most susceptible to mental illness and most disorders originate in childhood, we must make mental health a priority in our classrooms and in our families. The Government have therefore announced a series of steps to ensure children and young people get the support they need. We will:

Commission a major thematic review of children and adolescent mental health services across the country, led by the Care Quality Commission with assistance from Ofsted—the first of its kind.

Bring forward a new Green Paper on children and young people’s mental health later this year, to set out plans to transform services in schools, universities and for families.

Introduce new support for schools with every secondary school in the country to be offered mental health first aid training and new trials to look at how to strengthen the links between schools and local NHS mental health staff.

Develop peer support for children and young people’s mental health and emotional wellbeing—confirming a programme of pilot activity on peer support, as outlined earlier in the year, along with £1.5 million in funding.

Launch a programme of randomised control trials of promising preventative programmes, across three different approaches to mental health promotion and prevention.

Second, we must work with employers to ensure better mental wellbeing in the workplace. Because we know that there are important steps businesses can take to support their workforce, and those that do see benefits in higher productivity and lower absence. The Prime Minister has therefore appointed Lord Dennis Stevenson, the long-time campaigner for greater understanding and treatment of mental illness, and Paul Farmer CBE, CEO of Mind and Chair of the NHS Mental Health Taskforce, to drive work with business and the public sector to support mental health in the workplace. These experts will lead a review on how best to ensure employees with mental health problems are enabled to thrive in the workplace and perform at their best. This will involve practical help including promoting best practice and learning from trailblazer employers, as well as offering tools to organisations, whatever size they are, to assist with employee wellbeing and mental health. We will also review recommendations around discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of mental health.

Third, we need to offer alternatives to hospital to support people in the community. We recognise that seeing a GP or going to A&E is not or does not feel like the right intervention for many people with mental ill-health, the Government will build on their initial £15 million investment to provide and promote new models of community-based care such as crisis cafes and community clinics. The initial £15 million investment led to 88 new places of safety being created. Since 2011-12, there has been an almost 80% reduction in England of people experiencing a mental health crisis being taken to police cells, utilising health-based place of safety, rather than being held in a cell, ensuring people get the best support—in the right place, at the right time, in the right way. The Government now plan to spend up to a further £15 million to build on this success.

Fourth, we will expand treatment by investing in and expanding digital mental health services. Digitally assisted therapy has already proved successful in other countries and the Government will speed up the delivery of a £67.7 million digital mental health package so that those worried about stress, anxiety or more serious issues can go online, check their symptoms and if needed, receive clinically-assisted therapy over the internet, when this is clinically appropriate for the person rather than waiting weeks for a face-to-face appointment—with face-to-face sessions offered as necessary. We will:

Introduce a major £60 million investment, £30 million from Government and £30 million from trusts, of digitally assisted mental health services in six mental health trusts, badged Global Digital Exemplars for mental health. Global Digital Exemplars will be expected to make a step change in their use of digital technology, informatics and data to improve value overall by improving the processes of care, using information to better inform decision making about care, improving the levels of safety and effectiveness of care, improving the ability to sustain continuous quality improvement and improving patient access to appropriate evidence based care.

Pilot digitally-assisted therapy for the NHS's talking therapies programme. This £3 million pilot will trial existing treatments and offer patients faster effective therapy for illnesses such as anxiety and depression and involve working with NICE to establish a new accelerated accreditation process, to ensure

mental health patients can access treatments that take full advantage of changing technology which have been properly tested and accredited, with products becoming part of the mainstream offer to people if meeting NICE standards.

Strengthen the mental health content of the clinical triage platform for NHS 111 with a £3.3 million investment, ensuring improved waging of those experiencing mental ill-health using the NHS' online platforms, as well as allow self-referrals online.

Pilot and further roll out the health based place of safety capacity management app at a cost of £900,000 to help police and health services manage places of safety spaces in real time.

Develop a set of apps and resources for £500,000, which will be included on an online digital health tools library, and rolled out on commercial platforms like the Apple App store.

Fifth, we must right the everyday injustices that those with mental health problems face. We will:

Work with money and mental health policy institute to undertake a review of the mental health and debt form and agree an approach that will end this unfair practice.

Support NHS England's commitment, made this year, to eliminate inappropriate placements to inpatient beds for children and young people by 2020-21.

Publish the refreshed Government Suicide Prevention strategy a copy of which can be viewed at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2017-01-09/HCWS397>.

### *Suicide Prevention*

The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 4,820 suicides were registered in England during 2015—equivalent to 13 people per day. Self-harm is also on the rise, with up to 300,000 hospital attendances per year in England categorised as resulting from self-inflicted injury.

We are already taking steps to help reduce suicide. The £247 million investment in mental health liaison services will see trained psychiatrists and counsellors made available in emergency departments to assess, counsel and refer patients on to other mental health services if they present with signs of self-harm or other psychological distress.

Local authorities will also be expected to strengthen local suicide prevention plans, and there is an explicit focus on improving how services respond to cases of self-harm, which is the biggest single indicator that a person may be at increased risk of suicide.

It is hoped that the new strategy, which sets out how local areas should do more to support those at high risk of suicide, will also encourage local authorities strengthen efforts to reach other groups known to be at increased risk.

These include young men—who are three times more likely to die by suicide than women—those in contact with the criminal justice system and certain occupational groups.

Many parts of the country already have established preventative plans. These vary by area, but have included: stronger outreach and liaison services, dedicated services for young people who self-harm and training programmes to help health professionals, police and other community services to understand how to identify and respond to people in acute distress.

All local authorities will now be expected to develop strong, multi-agency suicide prevention plans by the end of 2017, ahead of these being checked and approved by the Department of Health.

In addition, NHS England will develop a new care pathway for self-harm, which will provide greater consistency in how those groups are cared for across the NHS, with consistent treatment guidelines for the recognition, treatment and management of self-harm.

There will also be an increased focus on ensuring those who have been recently bereaved—which are another group at increased risk of suicide—receive information and follow-up support to help them cope with their loss.

[HCWS397]

## TRANSPORT

### Safe Use of Drones: Consultation

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr John Hayes):** My noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon) made the following ministerial statement on Wednesday 21 December 2016.

Today, I am pleased to inform the House that the UK Government have launched a consultation

“Unlocking the UK’s high tech economy: consultation on the safe use of drones in the UK”.

Drone technology represents a great opportunity for the United Kingdom, but it is crucial that we strike a careful balance in our approach to drones—a balance between pushing their commercial uses and ensuring safety considerations.

The Government’s industrial strategy will support our ambition for Britain to become the global go-to place for scientists, innovators and tech investors, and the development of new technologies such as drones is key to that. We are already well-placed: alongside the Government’s support for trials and projects, the Civil Aviation Authority has granted over 2,000 commercial drone operator permissions. But we want to further drive forward progress in the UK drones industry by fostering the right supportive environment.

In the UK, drones are already being used by the police, fire services and search and rescue in emergency situations, by energy, road and rail providers to inspect and maintain our key infrastructure, and by conservation organisations to monitor natural environments. Drones are saving time and money, improving delivery of services in these areas, improving safety and even helping to save

lives. As the technology develops, we will see drones being used in other fields to achieve similar results. There are also many leisure users of drones, who must follow the strict laws in place, such as keeping their drone within their sight. With the photographic and videography opportunities drones present, sales of drones to this audience are increasing at pace.

But like many other technologies, drones can also be misused and challenge safety, security and privacy. While the vast majority of drone users are law-abiding and have good intentions, it is likely that some are not aware of the rules that apply and inadvertently break them, risking safety, privacy and security. It also cannot be ignored that there will be some who will purposefully break the laws on drones, and potentially use drones to cause harm.

The Government’s vision is for a society and economy in the UK where drones are safely and properly used in ways that improve the delivery of public and commercial services, where all leisure drone users are aware of the rules and adhere to them, and where flourishing drone service businesses are contributing to the UK economy, creating jobs and encouraging the development of important new skills in the UK. We want to create the right conditions for new uses of drone technology to emerge and grow, placing the UK at the cutting edge of new technologies and capturing a significant portion of the global drone applications market. We will not do so unless we take the safety, security and privacy challenges and our duties to the general public extremely seriously.

This consultation sets out some of the next steps under consideration for doing so. These proposals aim to keep pace with this fast emerging market, balancing the challenges appropriately without restricting the opportunity drones present. They are intended to ensure the global competitiveness of the UK as a home for innovation and technological investment while providing the assurance the public need. As the technology and market opportunities develop, we want to proactively address these challenges, and support the growing and changing UK drones services industry.

The consultation is published on gov.uk and the deadline for responding is 15 March 2017.

Responses are encouraged from drone operators (commercial and leisure), the aviation industry, drone manufacturers and other companies involved in the drone market, model aircraft associations and their members, the insurance industry, members of the public and relevant NGOs, higher education institutions and research and development institutions, local authorities, and Members of both Houses.

[HCWS395]



# Petitions

Monday 9 January 2017

## OBSERVATIONS

### BUSINESS, ENERGY AND INDUSTRIAL STRATEGY

#### Bozeat branch of the Post Office

*The Humble Petition of residents of Bozeat, Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas,*

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that the Bozeat branch of the Post Office should extend its opening hours to 9am until 5pm six days a week; and further that to accommodate greater usage of the facility and to prevent congestion at other facilities used elsewhere by the villagers.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to encourage the Post Office to extend the opening hours of their Bozeat village branch.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.—[Presented by Mr Peter Bone, Official Report, 8 November 2016; Vol. 616, c. 1488.]

[P001976]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Margot James):*

The Government recognise the value of Post Office services to local communities across the country and understand that any change to service provision can cause concern for the community affected.

The Post Office operates as an independent business and the Government do not interfere in day to day operational responsibilities of the company, which includes decisions on the provision and location of individual Post Office services.

The Post Office appreciates how important its services are to local communities and is committed to maintaining access to services wherever possible. Unplanned closures can occur as a result of a situation beyond the control of the Post Office. Where this happens, the Post Office works quickly to try to restore services to the community, where possible.

The Government understand that the Post Office undertook a local consultation in the community prior to the reintroduction of services via the current partner outreach arrangement operating from the local village shop. If the community has further concerns regarding the provision of local Post Office services it should raise these direct with the Post Office.

### COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

#### Tenancy of St Michael's Gate, Parnwell

*The petition of residents of Peterborough,*

Declares that residents of St Michael's Gate are being threatened by eviction from their landlords Stef and Philips acting on behalf of Paul Simon Magic Homes;

further that the private landlord who has recently acquired St Michael's Gate has entered into agreement with Peterborough City Council to house homeless people at the properties; further that as a result of this agreement, all current longstanding tenants will be evicted, and some former tenants, including families, have had to declare themselves homeless; and further that Peterborough City Council should be doing more to support residents against their eviction by the private landlords.

The petitioners therefore urge the House of Commons to put pressure on Peterborough City Council to ensure that residents of St Michael's Gate in Parnwell, Peterborough, are protected from eviction by their landlords.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Stewart Jackson, Official Report, 2 November 2016; Vol. 616, c. 1006.]

[P001971]

*Observations from the Minister for Housing and Planning (Gavin Barwell):*

The Government recognise the difficult position that residents of St Michael's Gate have been placed in by their landlord's decision to apply for possession, and we are aware that this has resulted in some households approaching the local authority for help.

Local authorities have duties toward homeless households. For unintentionally homeless households in priority need, authorities must secure suitable settled accommodation. If this is not available then the household must be placed in temporary accommodation until settled accommodation can be found.

We know that Peterborough Council has issued a statement committing to support the residents of St Michael's Gate if they require help finding alternative accommodation, and stating that households who are unable to secure alternative accommodation without support can contact the council's housing needs team.

The decision to gain possession of St Michael's Gate is a private matter for the landlords and our understanding is that the offer of the properties to Peterborough Council as temporary accommodation was made following this decision.

As regards the use of St Michael's Gate as temporary accommodation for homeless families, the sourcing of such accommodation is for local authorities to decide on, depending on availability and household need in the area (subject to the statutory guidelines requiring the accommodation to be suitable). However, our understanding is that the properties in St Michael's Gate are being taken by the council on three year leases, and we would encourage authorities to procure temporary accommodation under agreements of this length, which give more stability to homeless families than short term agreements.

Private Sector landlords play an important role in meeting the housing needs of many households. The Housing Act 1988 enables a landlord to regain possession of their property at any time after any fixed term comes to an end or at any time during a contractual or statutory periodic tenancy, provided it is at least 6 months since the start of the original tenancy. The landlord must also give the tenant at least two month notice that he or she requires possession.

Without the certainty that landlords can seek repossession when required, landlords would be reluctant to let their properties. We believe that more restrictive and excessive legislation would mean that fewer homes would be available to rent. This would not help landlords or tenants.

The Government are committed to building a bigger, better private rented sector which provides security and stability for both tenants and landlords. We know how

important housing affordability is and believe that increasing supply is the best way of improving quality, choice and affordability for tenants. We have introduced several initiatives to tackle this, including a £630 million fund providing equity finance to house builders and developers to stimulate building for private rent, and a debt guarantee for up to £10 billion for private rented and affordable housing schemes.

# Ministerial Correction

*Monday 9 January 2017*

## **EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION**

### **Exiting the EU: Science and Research**

*The following is an extract from the debate on Exiting the EU: Science and Research on 19 December 2016.*

**Mr Robin Walker:** The Government have also reassured organisations that structural and investment fund projects signed before the UK withdraws from the

EU will be guaranteed by the Treasury after we leave, **up to 2020.**—[*Official Report, 19 December 2016, Vol. 618, c. 1280.*]

*Letter of correction from Mr Robin Walker:*

An error has been identified in the speech I made in the debate on Exiting the EU: Science and Research on 19 December.

The correct statement should have been:

**Mr Robin Walker:** The Government have also reassured organisations that structural and investment fund projects signed before the UK withdraws from the EU will be guaranteed by the Treasury after we leave.

# ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 9 January 2017

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# MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 9 January 2017

	<i>Col. No.</i>
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**not later than  
Monday 16 January 2017**

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