

**Monday  
6 November 2017**

**Volume 630  
No. 47**



**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Monday 6 November 2017**

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# House of Commons

*Monday 6 November 2017*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### EDUCATION

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Foster Carers

2. **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the number of foster carers. [901598]

**The Minister for Children and Families (Mr Robert Goodwill):** The national fostering stocktake is currently under way, and it will report to Ministers with recommendations by the end of the year. It is exploring a wide range of issues, including the recruitment and retention of foster carers, giving us a better understanding of the current situation. The House should be aware that we have invested £900,000 supporting local authorities to develop new and innovative ways to recruit and train foster carers.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I have had the privilege of meeting some of our Nottingham foster carers, and I know what an amazing job they do, often for very little monetary reward. However, local authority children's services departments are under immense pressure—we have record numbers of young people in care, yet some departments have been forced to cut specialist support staff—and potential foster families are also under pressure, including from Government policies such as the bedroom tax. I welcome the national stocktake, but it is long overdue. What steps will the Government take to address the urgent need to recruit additional carers?

**Mr Goodwill:** I certainly echo everything the hon. Lady says about the value of foster carers. Indeed, 74% of looked-after children are in foster care, and the stocktake will give us more information on which to base our future policy. I met foster carers last week to discuss some of the problems they face and, indeed, the support we can give them following the stocktake.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): Does the Minister agree that, with the care system under increasing pressure, there is now a need for a root-and-branch, fundamental review of the care system in England, in the same way as there has been in Scotland?

**Mr Goodwill:** Certainly, the stocktake is part of this, and one of the most exciting developments has been the way in which innovation has been brought forward in this area. We have invested £200 million in the innovation fund, and I recommend that right hon. and hon. Members have a look at the No Wrong Door policy, which is working very well in North Yorkshire, or the Mockingbird constellation, which is a hub-and-spoke system to support foster carers dealing with some of the more difficult children.

**Mike Amesbury** (Weaver Vale) (Lab): What steps is the Minister taking to address the 61% decline in total apprenticeships from May to July 2017?

**Mr Speaker:** In relation to foster carers, I assume. [*Interruption.*] Well, it will have to be.

**Mr Goodwill:** The great thing about someone being a foster carer is that they do not need to carry out an apprenticeship, and I encourage people thinking about applying to do so. Although there is a surplus of fostering places, one of the problems we face is having foster carers with the right type of home—for example, large sibling groups are hard to place—and we have a lack of sufficiency in some parts of the country.

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I pay tribute to foster carers for the amazing work they do for our looked-after children nationally. In my experience, foster placements can be challenging for the carers, depending on the needs of the children. Will the Minister outline what extra training can be provided to improve the quality of placements and of decision making?

**Mr Goodwill:** Good local authorities do give their foster carers the support they need, and I have already mentioned the innovation funding that has helped them to do that more effectively. There are other ways in which we can help foster carers. For example, when an allegation is made against a foster carer, it can be treated in a different way from one against a social worker or a teacher. I hope that that will be addressed by the fostering stocktake, which is being very ably run by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers.

#### Exam and Assessment Framework

3. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): How she plans to review the new exam and assessment framework. [901599]

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** In November 2013, Ofqual, the exams regulator, published a regulatory assessment of the potential cost and delivery impact of the reformed general qualifications. As part of its ongoing work, Ofqual is committed to overseeing the introduction of the new exams and to evaluating their effectiveness. I want to add that we have recently consulted on the future of primary assessment, setting out our plans to establish a settled and trusted system.

**Rachael Maskell:** The new vocational exam framework assessment will need to change. Those who study tree surgery can fell trees only in the autumn. Harvesting is likewise seasonal, and animal husbandry assessment periods do not match the assessment framework. Such assessments

should occur at a time when they are appropriate, and other sectors are saying the same. Will the Minister relax the tight assessment periods, so that colleges can assess their students' skills properly?

**Nick Gibb:** We have to ensure that the assessment system is robust, so that students can be sure that their hard work is properly recognised and employers understand that the qualifications presented to them reflect the quality of their studying and the skills that they have acquired.

**Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op):** I wonder what the Minister's reflection is on the fact that in the maths higher paper for this year's GCSE, the pass mark was just 18 out of 100. Does he think that pupils sitting that exam would have been given the confidence to go on to do maths A-level? I can tell him that as a 16-year-old, I was the only girl in my sixth-form college to do further maths and maths A-level. Had I sat a GCSE paper that was impossible—not rigorous—I would not have chosen those subjects.

**Nick Gibb:** The new GCSE is significantly more demanding academically. That is to ensure that there is a better fit with maths A-level and more preparation for students to go on to study it. The comparable outcomes system ensures that roughly the same proportion of students achieve grades 1 to 9 as achieved A\* to G last year. That is why students might get a lower mark for a C grade or grade 4 this year, but as the students and schools become used to the new curriculum, I expect that figure to rise in future years.

**Mr Speaker:** There is a lot of nodding and shaking of the Huddersfield head, but let us hear the words out of the mouth of the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** I tried for many years when the Minister was on my Select Committee to get him to be more pragmatic and less ideological about these things. On this day of all days—the 25th anniversary of Ofsted—will he talk to Ofsted about what is going on? We are silo-ing so many young people in further-education colleges up and down the country. They cannot get on with their lives and cannot get on to apprenticeships because they cannot get a GCSE in English and maths.

**Nick Gibb:** Maths and English are key skills that young people need if they are to get on in life. There is a direct correlation between the income young people and adults earn if they have those GCSEs and if they do not have those GCSEs. The rules say that those with a D or grade 3 in those GCSEs are expected to continue studying them. Those with lower grades can take stepping-stone qualifications in English and maths at further-education college. That is the best preparation for a long-term, successful career.

### Apprenticeships

4. **John Howell (Henley) (Con):** What progress she has made on broadening participation in apprenticeships. [901600]

19. **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** What progress she has made on broadening participation in apprenticeships. [901616]

**The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton):** Apprenticeship starts for women have gone up from 52% to 53% approximately; for people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, they have gone up from 10.4% to 11.2%; and for those with learning disabilities or difficulties, they are up from 9.9% to 10.3%. There is a great deal of work going on to broaden participation. The apprenticeship diversity champions network and the Careers and Enterprise Company are both doing an excellent job. I could go on, but I will not try your patience, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Well done.

**John Howell:** I am glad the Minister agrees that people with learning disabilities can make a valuable contribution to the workplace. She has mentioned the numbers, but will she say what the Government are doing to increase the chances for those with learning difficulties and disabilities to access apprenticeships?

**Anne Milton:** Indeed, I will, and I know that my hon. Friend has a particular interest in this. We have said that we will implement the Maynard taskforce recommendations in full. That includes introducing flexibility, so that the English and maths requirements can be adjusted for a defined group with a learning difficulty or disability. We have also made British sign language qualifications an alternative to English functional skills for those who have it as their first language. Of course, I am working closely with my colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

**Nigel Huddleston:** I welcomed the announcement in July of a new apprenticeship procurement process for non-levy employers. What assurances can the Minister give that the Department is now better placed to award apprenticeship funding to those employers who are so keen to train our young people?

**Anne Milton:** My hon. Friend is right that the procurement that was launched in July will ensure that there is good geographical coverage, stability of provision and high-quality apprenticeship training for small and medium-sized enterprises, but I accept that this has been an unsettling time. We are making £440 million available between January 2018 to April 2019 as an interim measure before employers get on to the proper apprenticeship system.

**Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab):** The Social Mobility Commission recommends that the application process for apprenticeships should be made clearer and simpler, and be better co-ordinated across institutions, so applicants can see what courses are available and what their outcomes will be—a bit like what happens when applying for university courses. Do the Government intend to introduce such a scheme?

**Anne Milton:** We are looking at a number of measures. As the hon. Lady rightly says, clarity is very important. The long-awaited and eagerly anticipated careers strategy

will set out some work on this, but a lot of other work is going on. We have to make sure that apprenticeships are easy to apply for and that it is easy to see exactly what they will give apprentices at the end of their apprenticeships.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): The Young Women's Trust points to a gender pay gap of 8% between women and men apprentices. What are the Government doing to close the gap?

**Anne Milton**: I will not miss an opportunity to remind businesses that they have until April next year to report their gender pay gaps. [Interruption.] That includes unions and Departments. I am pleased that apprenticeship starts for women have gone up, but I recognise there are issues around pay. The bottom line is that we want to ensure access for all young women in particular, but older women, too, many of whom are taking up apprenticeships as a way of returning to the workplace.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): Ofsted says that 37% of apprentice providers are not of good quality, and that does not include the 1,200 subcontractors. Does my right hon. Friend not agree that Ofsted should inspect subcontractors? Will she review the extent of subcontracting and ensure that all apprentices receive the quality training they deserve?

**Anne Milton**: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and he did excellent work in this area in his previous role. What matters to me is that every pound spent produces a pound's worth of good, high-quality training. We are looking at subcontracting to ensure money goes to where it is needed: producing high-quality apprenticeships that young people and employers value.

**Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): If we are looking to broaden apprenticeship participation, it helps to have as many people starting them as possible, but total apprenticeship starts in the three months since the levy came in, in spring, are down by a disastrous 61%. Why are Ministers not doing anything to promote traineeships, which can be game-changers for people accessing apprenticeships? With a 30% drop in traineeship starts by 19 to 24-year-olds this year and last week's critical comments from the Education Policy Institute, is it not time they did something?

**Anne Milton**: It is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman expresses dismay about apprenticeships. We need to talk apprenticeships up. There was a 47% increase between February and April 2017. We know there has been a fall in the number of starts, but that was anticipated because we have brought in a brand new system. He is absolutely right that traineeships play an important part in ensuring a path on which young people can travel to get on, but I urge him to speak up for apprenticeships and apprentices and to do everything in his power to encourage employers to take on apprentices.

### School Performance

5. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What comparative assessment she has made of the educational performance of schools in the UK, with (a) Japan and (b) Germany. [901601]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening)**: Educational performance in primary schools is continuing to improve in England, with maths scores improving from 2011 to 2015, and science scores improving significantly, too. Japan is among the highest performers in international assessments. Our primary school pupils are outperforming their peers in Germany.

**Sir Desmond Swayne**: Given that we spend more than Germany and Japan per pupil in England, does it show?

**Justine Greening**: My right hon. Friend is correct: our spending is above that of Japan and Germany. What is clear is that spending and investment alone are insufficient. We need the right strategy. Our work on an improved curriculum, investment in teacher development and new schools not just being council-run are key measures lifting up school standards in England.

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Youth unemployment in Germany has long been significantly lower than here. What lessons are the Government seeking to learn from the German system, particularly about technical and practical education?

**Justine Greening**: Youth unemployment rose by nearly 50% under the last Labour Government, and one of the best ways to make sure young people have opportunities is to have a thriving economy, but as the hon. Gentleman reiterates, a strong education system, including a strong technical education system, is critical, which is why we are introducing our reforms on T-levels.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): An important measure of educational performance is employability. In Germany, youth unemployment stands at 6.4% and in Japan, 5.1%; in my constituency, it stands at 1.6%, down 80% since 2010. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating schools in my constituency on getting their pupils work ready?

**Justine Greening**: I pay tribute to those schools; they are clearly doing an excellent job making sure that children are not only attaining academically but getting the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. That is not the case in the rest of the UK. In Wales, where Labour is in charge, standards are now falling.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): One way to improve the educational performance of UK schools would be to allow the creation of more good school places. Will the Secretary of State provide some much-needed clarity on the 50% cap on faith admissions for new free schools, which is holding up a number of school places in the pipeline?

**Justine Greening**: The hon. Lady will probably be aware that we have created 735,000 new school places since 2010, and we will make announcements on the faith cap in due course, but again I have to contrast our record with the reduction of 100,000 school places in the last six years of the last Labour Government.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I have no doubt that, in any assessment of the performance of UK, German and Japanese schools, schools in Harrow West would perform particularly well. Headteachers

there are telling me, however, that we need more investment in our schools, so that they do not have to cut the number of teaching assistants or replace experienced teachers with newly qualified teachers. What assurances can the Secretary of State offer the House that the Chancellor has got that point as well?

**Justine Greening:** Under the new national funding formula, all schools will get a cash rise in their budgets. As much as anything, the challenge now is finally to address the regional disparities that still exist in our education system.

### University Church of England Academy

6. **Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): What assessment she has made of progress at University Church of England Academy in Ellesmere Port since it was placed into special measures. [901602]

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** Ofsted judged University Church of England Academy to be inadequate in June 2017. The west midlands regional schools commissioner has been working with the University of Chester Academies Trust to help improve academic standards at the school, and an educational adviser visited the school in July to provide support. The trust has appointed a new chief executive officer and chair, and an application for emergency strategic school improvement funding and support from a local outstanding secondary school has been submitted.

**Justin Madders:** This school, which has consistently failed to reach the required standard, has been letting down kids in my constituency for far too long. How long will the Minister give it before he steps in?

**Nick Gibb:** We always take swift action when either schools or academies fail—that has been the hallmark of this Government—which is why there are 1.8 million more pupils in good or outstanding schools today than in 2010.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister, with his last answer, has widened the scope of the question somewhat. I would have argued that there was a rather long distance between Ellesmere Port and the hon. Gentleman's constituency of Cambridge, but thanks to the Minister, the hon. Gentleman can expatiate.

**Daniel Zeichner:** The salutary example of such schools is a warning to schools such as St Philip's Primary School in my constituency that are being forced into academisation. Extraordinarily, although there is a consultation, parents have been told that it is a foregone conclusion. Why is the Secretary of State so opposed to parental choice?

**Nick Gibb:** Actually, the academies and free schools programmes are increasing parental choice, because parents now have a choice of provider. It is not just the local authority providing schools; up to 500 new free schools have now been established, by parent groups, teachers and educational charities, and they are raising academic standards right across the board.

**Yvette Cooper** (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Given the broadening of the question, may I tell the Minister that I have met constituents who are parents at Freeston school, in Normanton, which has been hit by the shocking collapse of Wakefield City Academies Trust? They were promised a consultation on the school's future—they are worried about the future of special educational needs provision and about the school losing its name, its identity, its uniform—but all they have been offered is a meeting in another school in another town. They will have to travel miles and book tickets online—or else they cannot go. Does the Minister agree that that is not proper parent consultation and that Normanton parents need consultation in Normanton, at Freeston, before the consultation ends, and will he urge the Education Secretary to honour the commitment she made to me to meet me and other affected colleagues, because this is very serious?

**Nick Gibb:** Wakefield City Academies Trust had taken over many schools that had been underperforming for years. We were not happy with the performance of that multi-academy trust, which is why we took swift action, and why the schools in that trust are being re-brokered to more successful trusts such as Tauheedul Education Trust, one of the most successful multi-academy trusts in the country. We will not stand still while schools underperform; we take action. We re-broker academies, or we turn failing schools into academies.

**Mr Speaker:** Mr Davies, you seem to be in a state of great excitement. I call Mr Philip Davies.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

May I follow up the question asked by the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)? As the Minister will know, owing to the spending moratorium that Wakefield City Academies Trust imposed on High Craggs Primary School, which is in my constituency, the school built up a surplus, or balance, of £276,000. In recent days that money has been transferred from the school's account, without its authorisation and without its prior consent, and transferred to the trust. Surely the Government cannot stand aside and allow £276,000 to be taken out of the budget of a school in one of the most deprived parts of my constituency. Will the Minister do something to ensure that the money is reinstated for the benefit of pupils at that school?

**Nick Gibb:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. High Craggs Primary School was put into special measures in June 2015, before it became a sponsored academy. In 2016, just 23% of its pupils reached the expected standard in reading, writing and maths, compared to a national average of 53%. The school is now being re-brokered to be supported by the highly successful Tauheedul Education Trust, and Wakefield City Academies Trust will not be able to retain any of the reserves that it holds at the point of dissolution. Schools, including High Craggs, will receive the resources and support that they need in order to raise academic standards.

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Last week the Minister told me in a written answer that he would not publish a report on Wakefield City Academies Trust by the Education and Skills Funding Agency because it would be

“obstructive to the process of ensuring all the schools are placed with new trusts.”

Surely any financial issues are being disclosed to potential new trusts. What on earth is in the report that is so damaging to schools that it cannot be disclosed—or is it just so embarrassing to Ministers that they would rather hide behind excuses?

**Nick Gibb:** The issue of Wakefield City Academies Trust was not about finances, but about academic standards in the schools in that trust. That is why we are re-brokering all the schools in WCAT to other, more successful multi-academy trusts in the area. We are concerned not with making party political points, but with raising academic standards in each of the schools that serve pupils in those areas.

#### Universities UK/Universities Scotland

7. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): When she last met representatives from Universities UK and Universities Scotland; and what matters were discussed at those meetings. [901604]

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** I have regular contact with sector bodies such as Universities UK as part of our wider engagement with the sector. I met representatives of UUK in October and also in September, when I made a speech to its annual conference entitled “Embracing accountability and promoting value for money in Higher Education”.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Speaker,

“Scotland is losing out in the recruitment of international students...because the UK has one of the least competitive policies on post-study work in the English-speaking world.”

That is a direct quotation from the website of Universities Scotland. Will the Minister work with the Home Office and the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish universities can make stronger post-study work offers to international students?

**Joseph Johnson:** There is no cap on the number of international students who can come to study in Scotland, or in any other part of the United Kingdom. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that there has been a 24% increase in the number of international students coming to study at Scottish institutions since 2009-2010.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Despite any increases that the Minister may cite, the diversity of those students has narrowed dramatically. Higher education depends on the ability to attract and retain talent from across the world. The Minister will be aware that since 1998, Canada’s provincial nominee scheme has operated successfully, allowing provinces to vary immigration policy to suit their own requirements. I understand that the UK Government are anti-immigration, but Scotland is not. Will the Minister tell Universities Scotland what discussions he is having with the Home Office about the reinstatement of the post-study work visa?

**Joseph Johnson:** The Government have commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee to provide an assessment of the benefits of international students to the UK economy and our universities. As I said to the hon. Lady’s colleague, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald),

Scottish institutions have experienced a 24% increase in the number of international students coming to study at them since 2009-10.

**Carol Monaghan:** Of course, it is not just students who are having problems. Dr Jessamyn Fairfield is a physicist originally from New Mexico, but now lecturing in Galway. In August Dr Fairfield arrived in Cardiff to do a science show. Her parking pass and entry to the festival were considered payment in kind and she was denied entry to the UK. Similar cases have been documented involving academics attending conferences. Ironically, Dr Fairfield is back in the UK this week to receive a prize for scientific engagement. So what assurances can the Minister give to academics like Dr Fairfield, who is in Parliament today, that the UK remains open for conferences and academic events?

**Joseph Johnson:** We want the UK to remain the go-to place for scientists, tech investors and researchers in the years to come post-Brexit. We have given many assurances to EU researchers around the continent that they are welcome in the UK. We want their contribution to continue, they are hugely valued, and we have every expectation that that is going to continue to be the case.

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I wonder if the Minister told Universities UK how the Department was funding the Prime Minister’s announcements on student finance. Can he confirm that those will cost the Department £175 million in this spending review period, and can he guarantee that this will not be funded by yet more cuts to the rest of the education budget?

**Joseph Johnson:** I ask the hon. Lady to wait for the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s Budget in a few days’ time, because all the details of the funding of those announcements will be set out then.

#### Special Educational Needs

8. **Rosie Duffield** (Canterbury) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support children with special educational needs. [901605]

17. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): What steps she is taking to support children with special educational needs. [901614]

**The Minister for Children and Families (Mr Robert Goodwill):** The Children and Families Act 2014 heralded a transformation in support for children and young people with special educational needs. The transition period between the old and new systems, from statements to education, health and care plans, will end in March 2018.

**Rosie Duffield:** In my area, there is a chronic shortage of special needs school places. In Kent, nearly 7% of students with statements or EHCPs are not educated in the school setting, which is well above the national average. Does the Minister agree that every child in the UK is entitled to a school education, and will he instruct the Department for Education to support local authorities who are struggling to meet that need?

**Mr Goodwill:** I absolutely agree; we are on the same page on this. In Kent, schools have not been experiencing any reduction in high needs top-up funding in respect of pupils for whom they are receiving funding in the last academic year.

**Paula Sherriff:** It is over three years since the Minister's Department introduced significant changes to the special educational needs system. Two reports in the past month provide a damning indictment of how these reforms are going: Ofsted says there are significant areas of concern in one third of areas; and the local government ombudsman says families are suffering long delays in getting the right support. Does the Minister accept that these reforms are not working, and what does he intend to do?

**Mr Goodwill:** The hon. Lady must have been looking very hard indeed to find a parent who does not welcome these changes. Unlike statements and learning difficulty assessments, the new plans run from ages 0 to 25 where appropriate, and bring together in one place an assessment and details of planned provision for a child or young person's education, health and social care needs. The plans are driven by outcomes, have a strong focus on preparation for adult life, and include a section describing the views and aspirations of the child or young person themselves and their parents or carers.

**Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con):** One child in 100 is on the autistic spectrum, and 70% of those children will go to mainstream schools. The Government have a proud record in supporting autism; what more can be done to encourage best practice across the mainstream school sector?

**Mr Goodwill:** Schools receive up to £6,000 for each child as part of their funding formula, and if they need to apply for additional money, that money is forthcoming. We are keen to ensure that children with particular problems, including autism, are quickly identified and given the help they need, and the new scheme does that.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** Extracurricular activities including sport ensure a well-rounded education for all our students, and this is particularly important for those with special educational needs. Can the Minister tell me what support schools can get to provide those extracurricular activities?

**Mr Goodwill:** It is absolutely true to say that all children benefit from better access to sports provision, not only physically but academically. I am pleased that we have doubled the primary sport and PE premium using money from the soft drinks levy. I am also a big fan of cadet forces, and we have used £50 million from the LIBOR fines to fund that activity. I would like to see more state schools with cadet forces.

**Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab):** We all support and recognise the need for additional funding for high needs grants and special needs. In Stoke-on-Trent, we have received £4 million under the review of the funding formula, but Stoke-on-Trent City Council has written to the Secretary of State asking for £3 million of that to be clawed back to fund high needs grants, taking it away from the schools it has been designated for. Will the Minister and the Secretary of State meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) to discuss this? We have both written to the Minister asking him to ensure that the schools that desperately need that money can retain it.

**Mr Goodwill:** Local authorities, including Stoke-on-Trent, can apply to disapply 0.5% of their funding and deploy it in that particular way.

## Free Childcare

9. **Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op):** What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the roll-out of 30 hours of free childcare. [901606]

13. **David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the roll-out of 30 hours of free childcare. [901610]

**The Minister for Children and Families (Mr Robert Goodwill):** The early intelligence that we are gathering about the autumn term is very encouraging. More than 216,000 parents have received eligibility codes for this term and more than 90% have found places. Independent evaluation of the early delivery areas found that a quarter of mothers and one in 10 fathers had increased their working hours. Providers are willing and able to deliver the offer to working parents.

**Luciana Berger:** I welcome the Minister's reply, but has he seen the online campaign entitled "Champagne Nurseries on Lemonade Funding"? The truth is that providers are really struggling to provide the 30 hours of childcare that the Government say they should. A woman in my constituency, Claire Gallagher, is rated outstanding as a childminder, but she has faced a 32% cut in her hourly rate from £6.05 an hour to £4.10, despite the Government's claim that no provider would be more than 10% worse off. What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues in the Treasury to ensure that this policy is adequately funded in the upcoming Budget? If there have not been any such discussions, when will there be?

**Mr Speaker:** I was going to advise the hon. Lady to pursue an Adjournment debate on this matter, until I realised that in fact she had just had one.

**Mr Goodwill:** We carried out detailed work using Frontier Economics, which reported in July 2017, and we have increased the funding to £4.94 on average from £4.56. I have met a number of nurseries that seem to be outliers that, unlike most, are unable to deliver for that price. We have asked them to supply detailed information to find out why that is. Is it because they are not working to the ratios that others are? Is it because they have high property costs? We would be keen to see that detailed information and to find out why they are outliers, so that we can work with them to ensure that they can deliver within the money, as the majority of providers are doing.

**David Hanson:** Constituents of mine who use or work in nursery facilities on both sides of the England-Wales border report the capacity issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) has just mentioned. The Minister says that 90% have found places. Will he tell us how many of that 90% have got the full 30 hours?

**Mr Goodwill:** Well, it is certainly up to them. The evidence that I get when I visit nurseries up and down the country is that many parents are actually taking extra hours and paying for the wraparound hours. When I was at a nursery in Wolverhampton two weeks ago, parents there told me that they already had their children in the nursery and were having trouble finding the funding for that, but that when their children turned

three in January, they would then get access to the 30 hours funding. So the vast majority of parents are accessing the full 30 hours. Also, they can mix and match between childminders, nurseries and other voluntary sector providers.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Last week, I met Cheryl Hadland, the managing director of Tops Day Nurseries, which includes the much-valued nursery at Musgrove Park Hospital, to discuss what the 30 hours of free childcare means for nurseries. The recruitment and retention of nursery workers is that organisation's ongoing challenge, and staff account for 70% of its costs, which relate to the minimum wage and the living wage. I applaud this Government's commitment to the 30 hours of free childcare, which has been welcomed by parents. However, will the Minister ensure that any increases in the living wage and the minimum wage are taken into account, so that nurseries can successfully deliver this service in Taunton Deane?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady's eloquence has ensured that Taunton Deane makes Wavertree look like a model of pithiness.

**Mr Goodwill:** We are of course well aware of the cost pressures that may fall upon nurseries, and we are keen to work with them to address some of the business management decisions that they may need to make in order to live within the funding that we are making available. As we have discovered, the mean cost of funding is £3.72 per hour, and our funding is £4.94 per hour and therefore allows for adequate funding, as the evidence has shown.

16. [901613] **Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Nearly 200,000 children in Britain fall behind by the age of five, and one children's centre closes every single week. In order to improve life chances, does the Minister believe that funding for Sure Start should be ring-fenced and that the closures should be stopped?

**Mr Goodwill:** Local authorities make decisions about how best to address the needs of children from underprivileged backgrounds. Much has changed since 2010, including the early years pupil premium and the 15 hours of free childcare for those who would qualify for free school meals, for example. It is up to local authorities to decide how best to deliver that. Indeed, my local Sure Start centre raised with me the issue of the many children who should be at the centre who are not. That is a role for those who are going out to mentor people in their communities.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister's colleague, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), wrote to a constituent stating that the funding of the 30-hour entitlement is based on the premise that 15 hours was for educational provision and the additional 15 hours was just for general care without an educational focus. However, the Conservative party has always promised high-quality early education, so was his colleague correct or not?

**Mr Goodwill:** No, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) was not correct. Indeed, she made that clear when I spoke to her about it; she had misheard something that was said to her. The hon. Lady keeps falling into the trap of not letting the facts

get in the way of a good story. Indeed, she has also lured some journalists into that trap. Will she finally admit that the policy is working successfully and that children are receiving the childcare they need?

### GCSE/A-level Standards

10. **Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): What steps she is taking to make GCSE and A-level exam standards more rigorous. [901607]

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** We are reforming GCSEs and A-levels to make them more knowledge based and academically rigorous, to match the best education systems in the world and to keep pace with the demands of universities and employers. The reforms are intended to ensure that pupils, employers, colleges and universities can have confidence in the qualifications.

**Theresa Villiers:** A teacher came to my surgery on Saturday to say that while she was determined to provide the best teaching of the new history course, which has a tougher exam, she was finding it hard to do that when asked by the school to cover for a colleague on maternity leave whom the school did not feel that it could replace. Is there any help that can be given to schools as they face the twin challenges of budget pressures and the introduction of a completely new history course?

**Nick Gibb:** I am pleased to tell my right hon. Friend that help is available. While core school funding has been and is being protected in real terms, we understand that schools are facing cost pressures due to higher employers' national insurance contributions and higher contributions to teachers' pensions. We will continue to work to deliver the initiative set out in the schools buying strategy to help schools get the best value for their non-staff expenditure, such as through regional purchasing hubs, and we will support schools in managing their staff and workloads by implementing flexible working and by deploying support staff effectively.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): There is no single model for rigorous assessment. I recently held a series of meetings with year 12 and year 13 students in schools across my constituency, and one issue of concern to them all was the move away from coursework to closed exams. They believe that such exams provide an incomplete assessment of their abilities, discriminate against those who are unwell on the day of an exam, and are a contributory factor in the growth of mental health problems. Will the Minister agree to look at those concerns?

**Nick Gibb:** We looked carefully at that issue. We found that controlled assessments were consuming vast amounts of teaching time and a culture of resits was taking up more teaching time. Ofqual said that the controlled assessment system was not the most reliable way of assessing pupils.

### Education Spending

11. **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What steps she has taken to inform parents about changes in the level of education spending. [901608]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):**

We have been very clear that, with the additional £1.3 billion we are investing in our schools, overall funding will be maintained in real terms per pupil for the next two years, as the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies has confirmed. Of course, if parents want to check the actual funding for their school, they can see it on the Department for Education website, which has to comply with Office for National Statistics standards, unlike some of the websites that put up inaccurate data.

**Daniel Kawczynski:** Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the additional £3.7 million that we have secured for Shropshire will ensure that there are no cuts to any of our schools? Will she do more to ensure that websites such as School Cuts are confronted about the erroneous information they are putting out, which is causing a lot of concern among parents?

**Justine Greening:** Indeed, it is very much scaremongering. The Department for Education's published formula illustrations show, as my hon. Friend says, that his Shropshire schools are gaining an additional £3.7 million by 2019-20, of which £2.6 million will be allocated in 2018-19. The websites he mentions are fundamentally misleading, and their claims are based on flawed calculations. They say that money to schools is being cut when it is increasing, and they say that teacher numbers will go down although they are going to go up. Of course, that is all contrary to the Leader of the Opposition's claims last week, but the national funding formula provides cash gains for every school.

**Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab):** Yesterday it was revealed in *The Sunday Times* that, on just one day in January, there were more than 50 classes of 50 pupils. The head of one of the schools affected said that that was due to trying to save money on supply teachers as a result of huge budget cuts. Does the Secretary of State agree with that head?

**Justine Greening:** The story was based, I think, on misleading facts. For example, some of the classes were of choirs or restructured PE classes, which would be expected to have more children. The bottom line is that the average primary class size is just 0.7 of a pupil higher than in 2010, despite there being 506,000 more primary school pupils. In fact, the average secondary school class size in 2018 will be some 0.3 of a pupil higher than in 2010. In other words, the figures are broadly stable. In spite of the fact that we have many, many more pupils in the system, we are making places available.

**Efficiency Savings**

12. **Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab):** What progress she has made on identifying the departmental efficiency savings of £1.3 billion announced in July 2017. [901609]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** My Department has been working to identify the efficiency savings that will ultimately result in a cash boost for schools and put £1.3 billion directly into the hands of headteachers. That means that, across the country, funding will be maintained in real terms per pupil over the next two years.

**Steve McCabe:** I cannot say that that was a terribly revealing answer, but the Minister for School Standards did better in a recent letter, in which he said that, over three years, the Department will cut about £1 billion from the free schools programme, which he was lauding a second ago, and 37% from the healthy living project. Is that how the Secretary of State is trying to compensate for the cuts she has made to the core schools budget?

**Justine Greening:** Most parents would be staggered that the hon. Gentleman is so against my looking across my Department to make sure that I challenge it and its officials to work as efficiently as we are now challenging schools to be. That is quite right, and I am now able to put the fruits of that initiative into the hands of headteachers, providing them with more money on the frontline. We will be making effective savings, which is actually the way to get more out of our education budget.

**Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab):** Can the Secretary of State confirm the National Audit Office assessment that £2.7 billion has been cut from the schools budget since 2015, and that the £1.3 billion she mentioned earlier will protect budgets only until 2020, after which she will either need new money from the Treasury or she will need simply to deliver another cut to school funding?

**Justine Greening:** As the hon. Lady should know, the next spending review process is yet to get under way. Of course school budgets, alongside every other budget across government, will be agreed as part of that. We had a question earlier about the fact that money and results are not necessarily correlated, and I have to say that if there is one part of our United Kingdom where a Government are failing their children, it is Wales—where Labour is in charge—not England.

**GCSE Results**

14. **Ms Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con):** What assessment she has made of the effect of the free school and academy programmes on recent GCSE results. [901611]

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** The free school and academy programmes are helping pupils from all backgrounds to achieve their potential. Pupils in converter academies are achieving top GCSE results and, together with pupils in free schools, are making on average more progress than pupils in other types of schools. Secondary sponsored academies have also improved, often from difficult circumstances, with more pupils achieving good GCSEs in English and maths this year.

**Ms Ghani:** I thank the Minister for his response. Crowborough's Beacon Academy, which is in my constituency, has been named as the best school in East Sussex. It is in the top 3% in the country, with 77% of its pupils achieving five or more passes at GCSE. The headteacher, Anna Robinson, has taken this academy to the top of the league tables. Will the Minister join me in congratulating her and the schools' students on a great job? Is this not another example of the Government's education policies enabling our children to reach their full potential?

**Nick Gibb:** I am delighted to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Beacon Academy on its GCSE results this year. The provisional 2017 figures show that 56% of its students are entered for the increasingly important EBacc combination of core academic GCSEs. The pupils' progress puts it in the top 12% of schools nationally on that measure.

**Mr Speaker:** I have been independently advised, and I can confirm, that today both questions and answers are notably long.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Minister mentioned children of all backgrounds. What is the funding allocation for the coming academic year for counselling services and help for transgender children, which the charity Stonewall describes as being in a seriously bad state?

**Nick Gibb:** The Government Equalities Office has allocated £3 million for a programme to tackle HBT—homophobic, biphobic and transphobic—bullying. That programme is already in 1,200 schools up and down the country, and it is very successful.

22. [901619] **Oliver Dowden** (Hertsmere) (Con): As the Government rightly continue to push local authorities to make provision for more housing, the need for additional places at free schools and academies will increase. In my constituency, that makes the case for a new school to serve Radlett, Bushey and Borehamwood all the more pressing. What steps are the Government taking so that there is co-ordination between local authorities and the Department for Education when planning for new school places?

**Nick Gibb:** One of the first things we did when we came into office in 2010 was to double the amount of capital for basic need funding compared with what Labour had spent. Basic need funding for school places is based on a local authority's own data, and we fund every place that councils say they need to create. Local authority forecasts include key drivers of increased pupil numbers, such as rising birth rates and housing developments. Hertfordshire has already received £197 million for new places between 2011 and 2017, and it is allocated a further £57 million for the next three years.

### Relationship and Sex Education

15. **Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): When she plans to begin public consultation on the provision of relationship and sex education guidance in schools. [901612]

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** We are pressing ahead with our engagement process with relevant groups and interested individuals. We will be including parliamentarians over the coming months, and we will also seek the views of young people and parents. As has just been announced, Ian Bauckham, the chief executive officer of the Tenax Schools Trust and an executive headteacher, will advise on this work. He has considerable experience that will help us to ensure that schools teach a quality curriculum. Of course, following the engagement, we will consult on draft regulations and guidance, and we will then have a debate and a vote on the regulations in Parliament.

**Stella Creasy:** I do not think that anybody in this place would disagree that the last couple of weeks have shown us the power of teaching our young people to respect each other and to treat each other with respect. With 25 sexual assaults reported in our schools every day, will the Secretary of State please fast-track the policy on what schools should do if a report is made to them? This was promised months and months ago, and it is now urgent. I have a case in my constituency, and I know of others—this is too important to wait.

**Justine Greening:** We will issue interim guidance this term, but the hon. Lady is quite right that if we are to make a longer-term change in the sort of attitudes that drive unacceptable behaviour in workplaces, we have to make a start in schools, which is why we are now updating the relationship and sex education guidance for the first time since 2000. We all recognise the need and we will approach this responsibly.

### Topical Questions

T1. [901587] **Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Education (Justine Greening):** In October, I had the pleasure to go back to Rotherham to visit my former school, which is now called Oakwood High School. It was absolutely inspiring to meet the students there now, as I was many years ago. I also helped to launch the new DFE-supported Institute for Teaching in Manchester, which will help to drive up standards and produce excellent teachers. Recently, we had the flexible working summit at the DFE to ensure that teaching is a profession for the modern workplace, thereby helping to drive recruitment and retention.

**Mr Speaker:** Questions and answers in topicals really must be much shorter from now on. They have become increasingly long over a period and it is not helpful to the House or to the number of contributors.

**Dr Williams:** A survey published today by the Sixth Form Colleges Association shows that funding cuts have caused one third of providers to drop courses in STEM subjects. We know that colleges are also dropping vocational qualifications. Does the Secretary of State agree that this month's Budget must provide increased funds for colleges and sixth forms so that all forms of 16-to-19 education are on an equal footing for funding?

**Justine Greening:** I am, of course, always bidding for additional funding for education across the board, including technical education. The hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that maths is now the most popular A-level.

T5. [901593] **Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in celebrating the opening of Newark's free school? This first new school in the town for a generation aims to reverse the poor standards of education in Newark. It is a brilliant example of how Conservative party policy is transforming the lives of young people in my constituency.

**Justine Greening:** Indeed, and there are now almost 400 free schools. I very much congratulate the Nova Education Trust on opening the Suthers School. I know

that, as the chair of the governors, my hon. Friend will ensure that that school provides young people in his constituency with an excellent education.

T3. [901591] **Sarah Jones** (Croydon Central) (Lab): Two years ago, the Government promised legal action on the exorbitant costs of school uniforms. When will the Secretary of State keep that promise?

**Justine Greening:** We have given clear guidance to schools that uniforms need to be affordable, but the hon. Lady is absolutely right that this is an important issue. It is certainly a cost that many parents worry about, and I assure her that making further progress to address it is on our agenda.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): New housing developments in my constituency are coming on stream quickly, but the necessary infrastructure, including school places, must be in place to support that growth. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the new funding formula will help to address this issue and ensure that such infrastructure is in place?

**Justine Greening:** Under the new formula, money will follow the child and it will be flexed if they have additional needs. Of course, we work hand in hand with local authorities to make sure that basic need capital funding is available to ensure that we keep up with the need for school places. As I said, there have been 735,000 new school places since 2010. This Government are planning ahead and will continue to do so.

T4. [901592] **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): It has been brought to my attention that some academy trusts are increasingly encouraging parents whose children have challenging behaviour to home educate them to avoid those children being excluded. However, the parents are very poorly supported with respect to home education. Is the Secretary of State aware of this trend and is she inclined to do something about it?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Lady will welcome the fact that when we recently published the results of the race disparity audit, a key part of the launch was the announcement of a review of exclusions, because we want to make sure that they are dealt with effectively by schools. That sits alongside announcements on improving the quality of alternative provision.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What steps are being taken to include marriage in relationships education?

**Justine Greening:** This is exceptionally important. At the heart of this is the fact that we are trying to help young people to understand how commitments and relationships are very much at the core of a balanced life that enables people to be successful more generally. That is why we are looking to update the guidance, alongside the fact that the world in which young people are becoming adults is, frankly, now a much more difficult one. There are all sorts of challenges, not only in communities but, critically, online, so there are lots of reasons to do this.

T6. [901595] **Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I recently met headteachers across Hull who told me that one way to mitigate the real-terms cuts in school funding would be to auto-enrol all pupils who are eligible for pupil premium when their family receives benefits. Will the Secretary of State please explore how the Department for Work and Pensions can share data with the Department for Education to make that auto-enrolment happen, so that schools in Hull and other deprived areas of England and Wales receive the additional funding that they so desperately need?

**Justine Greening:** I take the hon. Lady's point. It is important that we work with schools—and indeed parents—to ensure that they get all the benefits and support to which they are entitled. I assure her that work is under way to ensure that children and schools are not underfunded, and are receiving what they should receive.

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): Page 50 of the Conservative party manifesto says:

“We will replace the unfair and ineffective inclusivity rules that prevent the establishment of new Roman Catholic schools”.

It did not promise an interminable review. When will my right hon. Friend implement Conservative policy?

**Justine Greening:** I am not sure whether my hon. Friend responded to that review, but we certainly had a number of responses. We are looking through them carefully and I will update the House in due course.

T7. [901596] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Universities were shocked when a member of the Government took it upon himself to write to them seeking details of the professionals teaching Brexit-related courses. Is the Secretary of State comfortable with that sort of McCarthyite behaviour? If not, what will she do about it?

**The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation (Joseph Johnson):** That letter was sent not by the Government, but by an MP acting in an individual capacity. The Government have made it clear that they fully support academic freedom and have recently entrenched that further in law through the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): Under the new national funding formula, West Sussex schools are set to have a funding increase of 10.7%. However, the county has been historically one of the lowest funded. Are there any other measures that can be brought forward to ensure that that historical underfunding is righted?

**Justine Greening:** As my hon. Friend says, the national funding formula aims to address the inequity that has been baked into our funding system for many, many years. That sits alongside the pupil premium investment and the work that increasingly takes place in our schools to make sure that they operate in a way that maximises the educational impact that they get for every single pound. That means a focus on efficiency.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): When I used to mark A-level economics scripts, a key aspect of getting a higher grade was knowing the difference between a

real-term increase and a cash increase. Why does the Secretary of State choose to set such a bad example to our students by deliberately muddying those two concepts?

**Justine Greening:** The hon. Gentleman might have marked those exams, but I ended up getting a first-class economics degree at university—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ooh!”] I can tell him that the difference between what we are proposing under the national formula is the fact that under our approach, schools will get a cash increase, but under Labour’s approach, they would have had their cash absolutely frozen. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not know why the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) is hollering from a sedentary position. I always had him down as an academic, indeed a rather cerebral fellow, who is capable of somewhat statesmanlike behaviour, from which he seems to be departing this afternoon—not to be repeated.

**Wendy Morton** (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): Ryders Hayes Primary School in my constituency recently opened a new teacher training facility—it is in a fantastic wood cabin. What are Ministers doing to promote teacher training opportunities and to encourage more participation?

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** I congratulate the school in my hon. Friend’s constituency. More than half of teachers are trained through school-led systems, which means that schools have more control over the quality of the training that their teachers receive, and that schools can look for graduates and undergraduates to join their staff in the most effective way.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The Support Our Sixth-formers funding impact assessment, which was published today, shows general sixth-form education under real strain. Bearing in mind that each sixth former is funded at £4,500, compared with £5,700 for a pupil aged between 11 to 16, will the Secretary of State take the opportunity of the Budget to use last year’s underspend and uplift funding by £200 for each student aged 16 to 18?

**Justine Greening:** We have maintained that rate across the course of this spending review. It is probably not for me to pre-empt what will be in the Budget.

**Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on the progress of the introduction of the T-level in catering and hospitality? It is eagerly anticipated by the tourism and hospitality sector, and is essential for providing the skilled staff that the sector needs for the future.

**The Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills (Anne Milton):** T-levels are long-awaited. We are starting down that road—the first few will come online in 2020, and there will be more in 2021 and 2022. I know that there is a great deal of interest in them, particularly from that sector.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State confirm that £1.5 billion has been taken out of school budgets since 2015, leading to a real-terms cut in per-pupil funding, which is contrary to what the Conservatives promised in their 2015 manifesto?

**Justine Greening:** There has never been more money flowing into our schools system. The schools budget has risen year on year. Over the next two years alone, it will rise from £41 billion a year to more than £43 billion a year.

**Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): Last Friday, I held the Wiltshire festival of engineering, inspiring more than 3,000 children and involving more than 35 businesses and organisations. The Schools Minister kindly attended. The event highlighted that Wiltshire really is a hub of engineering. Will the Minister confirm that the new careers strategy will encourage a better link between schools and businesses, and prioritise sectors with severe skills shortages, such as STEM?

**Nick Gibb:** It was a real pleasure to join my hon. Friend at the engineering fair and I pay tribute to her for creating such a wonderful occasion. It was attended by thousands of pupils from years 6 to 9, who will be inspired to take up STEM careers. A-level maths is now the single most popular A-level choice for the fourth year in a row.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State has said a lot about extra money going to schools and classrooms, but Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which is run by the Conservatives and independents, is trying to claw back £3 million of the additional £4 million, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) alluded to. Will the Secretary of State meet us so that we can work together to ensure that the money destined for our classrooms and children actually gets to them?

**Justine Greening:** We have put in place clear rules regarding the extent to which councils are able to switch money between the key funds. There is potential for them to go beyond that, but they would need to make an exceptional case.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that Paignton Community and Sports Academy does great work for my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). However, it is hampered by the fact that some of its buildings are from the 1940s. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss how we can deal with those old buildings?

**Justine Greening:** Either the Schools Minister or I will be very happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss that.

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): Some 50% of schools and colleges, including Huddersfield New College in my constituency, have dropped modern foreign language subjects from their subject choices, citing funding as a reason. What is the Minister doing to reverse this trend?

**Nick Gibb:** The hon. Lady raises a very real concern, which is why the EBacc is such an important performance measure for schools. There was a significant drop in the numbers studying foreign languages due to the last Labour Government’s decision to end compulsion at

key stage 4. Under this Government, the percentage of individuals taking a modern foreign language has increased from 40% to 47%, but we need to go further.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Rebecca Pow—a second Pow.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): Contact with nature can provide tremendous spin-offs for schoolchildren's mental and physical health. Will the Secretary of State

indicate whether any formal assessment has been made of projects such as the Forest School project at King's Hall in Taunton Deane? Might she be inclined to encourage green learning in schools?

**Justine Greening:** As well as being an economist, I am a keen gardener, so I think it is important for our children to learn about the environment around them—not just why it matters, but how to take care of it. We will talk to my hon. Friend about what more we can do.

## Paradise Papers

3.39 pm

**John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's actions to curb aggressive tax avoidance schemes in the light of the Paradise papers revelations.

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride)**: The Government believe in a fair tax system where everyone plays by the rules. It is this Government who have taken decisive action to tackle tax avoidance and evasion and to improve the standards of international tax transparency. The UK has secured an additional £160 billion in compliance revenue since 2010—far more than was achieved under the last Labour Government. Under this Government, the UK now has one of the lowest tax gaps in the world. We have provided Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs with tough new powers. In 2015, HMRC received £800 million in additional funding to go on tackling tax avoidance and evasion.

Let me turn to recent events. Yesterday evening, several international news organisations, led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, reported on an information leak regarding the financial affairs of a large number of individuals. I should remind the House at this stage that Ministers do not intervene in the tax affairs of individuals or businesses, as to do so would be a breach of taxpayer confidentiality. However, I can inform the House that, on 25 October, HMRC requested that the ICIJ, *The Guardian* and the BBC share the leaked data so that this information can be compared with the vast amounts of data that HMRC already holds due to the initiatives this Government have undertaken. They have yet to respond to this request.

Nevertheless, since these data were retrieved in 2016, the Government have implemented international agreements that have changed the game for those seeking to avoid and evade their taxes. HMRC is already benefiting from the automatic exchange of financial account information through the common reporting standard—an initiative in which the UK has led the world, with over 100 jurisdictions signed up. The Crown dependencies and overseas territories are among those signed up to this initiative, and have been exchanging information with HMRC for over a year. The Crown dependencies and overseas territories have also committed to holding central registers of beneficial ownership information, which the UK authorities are able to access.

It is important to note, and I quote the ICIJ's disclaimer here:

“There are legitimate uses for offshore companies and trusts” and the ICIJ does

“not intend to suggest or imply that any people, companies or other entities included in the ICIJ Offshore Leaks Database have broken the law or otherwise acted improperly.”

So, notwithstanding the generalised aspersions made by the Opposition, the use of offshore accounts or trusts does not automatically mean dishonesty. But this House should be assured that, under this Government, HMRC will continue to bear down with vigour on any tax avoidance or evasion activity, wherever it may be found.

**John McDonnell**: Unless there is a critically overriding reason, I believe the House will consider it unacceptable that the Chancellor is not here to address the biggest tax scandal of this generation.

The Minister's response today was the same bluster. He cites a figure for additional tax revenues that cannot be verified from any publically available data. He refers to a tax gap that does not include the likes of Apple, Facebook, Google and others. He boasts of this Government's efforts to address avoidance, yet last week they voted to protect non-doms in the Finance Bill. Last month, the European Parliament accused this Government of obstructing the fight against tax avoidance evasion and even money laundering. Does he not appreciate the outrage in our community at this tax dodging? Every pound in tax avoided is a pound taken away from our NHS, our children's education, and care for the elderly and the disabled.

Given that the chairman of the Conservative party and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible for administering

“the estates and rents of the Duchy of Lancaster”,

has the Chancellor or any Minister discussed these revelations with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), and will the right hon. Gentleman be apologising to Her Majesty for the embarrassment this episode has caused her?

With regards to Lord Ashcroft, a major funder of the Conservative party who reportedly contributed half a million pounds to the Conservatives in the general election campaign, will the Minister tell the House what information he has had about the domicile status of Lord Ashcroft between 2010 and 2015, and whether Lord Ashcroft was paying taxes on his overseas wealth?

The Chancellor now has an immediate opportunity to tackle tax avoidance. Can he assure the House that in the forthcoming Budget he will adopt Labour's proposals to remove exemptions from non-doms and secure full transparency of trusts? Will he now also agree to Labour's proposals to establish an independent public inquiry into tax avoidance? I tell the Government this: if they refuse to act, the next Labour Government will.

**Mel Stride**: The right hon. Gentleman raises the veracity or otherwise of our figures. We have collected £160 billion through clamping down on avoidance, evasion and non-compliance. That is a figure that he will find broken down and indeed published in Her Majesty's Treasury's annual report and accounts.

The right hon. Gentleman refers to Lord Ashcroft. As I said in my opening remarks, I am clearly not going to start getting into the individual tax affairs of any particular individual, regardless of their political allegiance or whoever they may be.

The right hon. Gentleman raises non-dom status and non-doms, and the measures that he and his party put forward for the most recent Finance Bill. Can I remind him of two things? It is the Conservative party that has put an end to permanent non-dom status, and it was Labour that sought, by voting against that Bill on Third Reading, to stop that from happening.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): There seems to be an extraordinary misunderstanding on the part of the shadow Chancellor about the difference between

[Mr Peter Bone]

avoidance and evading. Evading is wholly illegal; avoidance is normal. People who put their money into an ISA are avoiding tax—that is completely legal. There is a moral issue. If you happen to be a political party that spends £1 million a year on rent in a tax-exempt company, that is what people are upset about. It is not avoidance; it is morally wrong avoidance. Is that not what your party does, sir?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. My party does not do anything. As people know, I do not have a party. I am just the leader of the good order and fair play party, or I try to be.

**Mel Stride:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question, which I take to be directed at me, Mr Speaker. It is of course for the Labour party to account for any situation in which its headquarters may or may not be owned by an overseas trust.

**Stewart Hosie** (Dundee East) (SNP): It may well be that sheltering from our tax authorities sums of money greater than the GDP of many countries is not illegal, but does the Minister agree that that is precisely the problem? Does he also agree that the Paradise papers revelations, and the massive sums involved, now offer no hiding place for those who would deny a public register of beneficial ownership of funds and trusts, as well as businesses?

This tax avoidance is a driver of global inequality that runs to the very top of business, politics, entertainment and the establishment, in many countries, but these papers also shine a light on the hidden ownership of large corporations by foreign state institutions and individuals. To allow the public, customers and small investors to know who is really behind the most trusted of brands, will the Government now throw their weight behind not just local but global transparency on the beneficial ownership of businesses through offshore trusts, funds, and other opaque devices?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Gentleman will know that this Government have been at the forefront of clamping down on international tax avoidance, evasion and non-compliance through the OECD's base erosion and profit shifting project, which we have been in the vanguard of, and through the work on common reporting standards that we have been introducing among our Crown dependencies and overseas territories. He will find that we are no slouches when it comes to grappling with the items that he raises.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that this country is now leading the world on tackling tax avoidance? How does the action of consecutive Conservative Chancellors compare with the non-action of consecutive Labour Chancellors?

**Mel Stride:** As my right hon. Friend knows, one of the measures of how on top or otherwise the country is of its tax affairs is the tax gap, which is at an historic low of just 6%. Under the last Labour Government in 2005, the tax gap was 8%. If it were at the same level today as it was under Labour, we would be £11.8 billion of tax short—enough to employ every policeman and woman in England and Wales.

**Dame Margaret Hodge** (Barking) (Lab): The real problem with all the action that has been taken so far is that it has not got to the heart of the issue, which is that we need to have openness and transparency about who owns what company and where, and who owns what trust. There is a very simple action that the Government could take without any legislation, and that would immediately slice through a lot of the problems that we have seen in the Paradise papers, the Panama papers, the Falciani leaks and the Luxembourg leaks. Why will the Government not insist now that our overseas territories—our tax havens—have public registers of beneficial ownership?

**Mel Stride:** As the right hon. Lady knows, there are many good reasons why, for perfectly honest and decent purposes, individuals use trusts. She also knows that we have made a great deal of progress on the common reporting standard across 100 different countries, including those to which she alludes. We are also bringing forward the registers of beneficial ownership across those jurisdictions so that HMRC has the information that it requires.

**Nigel Mills** (Amber Valley) (Con): Will the Minister use the latest leak as a spur to the publication of certain things for which we have been waiting for a while? The anti-corruption strategy was promised for last December, but it got lost when the then champion stood down at the election. We are still waiting to know whether we will have a public register of the ownership of properties here by overseas companies. Can we move forward with those things, to give people confidence that our regime is robust?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend will know that we are examining several areas. He will also know that in June of this year—very recently—we brought in the money laundering regulations to make sure that banks, lawyers and accountants are properly focused, in real time, on ensuring that corrupt practices are identified and borne down on as appropriate.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): Is not the Minister worried about the tangled web of Russian money that appears to be involved at very high levels, as shown by these leaks? Will he not agree that there is now a great public interest in having transparency of ownership and getting these registers published as soon as possible? Why do not the Government just make an announcement that the overseas territories are going to do that, and get on with it?

**Mel Stride:** As I have already explained to the hon. Lady and the House, the register of beneficial ownership is now an element within these tax jurisdictions. It is accessible by HMRC, which is, after all, the authority that we rely on to bear down on tax avoidance. As to her comments about Russian money, I have no doubt that if HMRC can get the information that it has requested from the BBC, *The Guardian* and the group of journalists, it will be even better prepared to clamp down on such issues where activity is found to be inappropriate.

**James Duddridge** (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): When he looks at these issues with the overseas territories and Crown dependencies, may I urge the Minister to

bear in mind the states in the US that have worse standards? Standards need to be raised globally, not just in some of these island paradise states.

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to work with our international partners, which is why, as I have said, we have been working closely with the OECD on the base erosion and profit shifting project. We are well ahead of the pack in implementing those recommendations.

**Sir Vince Cable** (Twickenham) (LD): What sanctions have the Government taken, and what sanctions do they propose to take, in respect of British overseas territories that pursue tax policies that are damaging to Britain?

**Mel Stride:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are engaged in a variety of discussions with our international partners—not least with the European Union, in terms of the so-called blacklist—and we are looking closely at the concerns that they and others have, in order to strike an appropriate balance between protecting services that are very important to those particular jurisdictions and making sure that tax is paid fairly and as it should be.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Does the Minister agree that this is not just a question of countries such as the Caymans, Bermuda and other territories, but of countries in the European Union such as the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands, which are regarded as jurisdictions where tax advantages may be set up? Does he also agree that rather than singling out such jurisdictions, we should recognise that in a global environment in which capital is free to move around, the important factor is the effect of the UK tax structure on wealth—something that this Government have definitely got right?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point. To put it simply, it is not just the tax rate in a particular regime that is pertinent to the issues we are discussing—he mentioned the Republic of Ireland, where the rate is just 12.5%—but the other factors we need to look at in coming to such judgments.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): How many more “Panorama” programmes and leaks should we expect until we see full and proper action on tax avoidance and tax evasion in this country? As a starter for 10, may I suggest to the Minister that the Government reinstate the thousands of tax officer posts they have cut in Liverpool and right across the country?

**Mel Stride:** As the hon. Lady will know, this Government have brought in £160 billion in relation to tax avoidance since 2010, including £2.8 billion in respect of individuals attempting to hide funds overseas. She raises the issue of HMRC. As is quite right and proper, it is going through reconstruction and reassignments at the moment, so that we have a series of hubs with a critical mass of individuals in them and the right technology and infrastructure to go after those who, as assessed on a risk basis, are avoiding taxation.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome the lead the Government are taking internationally in tackling tax avoidance, because this is clearly not a

problem that we can solve on our own in isolation. Will my right hon. Friend advise us what the Government are doing to use transparency to make sure individuals, trusts and companies pay their fair share to the Treasury?

**Mel Stride:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. As I have pointed out a few times already, we are currently looking at reporting standards. We are also looking at various recommendations coming out of the BEPS regime, some of which were covered in the Finance Bill, to stop flagrant tax avoidance, sometimes on the part of some of the largest corporations in the country. As I mentioned earlier, the Labour party sought to kill that Bill on Third Reading.

**Liam Byrne** (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): When I asked officials at the Department for International Trade whether tax transparency was required in our trade treaties, they said that this was a novel idea, and it was certainly not included in the text of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. It is exactly this kind of secrecy that lets the rich hide billions while the people pay. Will the Minister ensure that we demand and insist on tax transparency in every single trade treaty presented to this House in the future?

**Mel Stride:** As the right hon. Gentleman will know, we are committed to country-by-country reporting, which we will push forward with multilaterally. As for our future trade treaties, they are for the future and for the Department for International Trade.

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Low rates of tax and growing tax revenues depend critically on every penny of tax due being paid. What is the position if someone receives a fee, then sends it to a trust fund in Mauritius only to receive the money back as a loan?

**Mel Stride:** I cannot comment on a specific tax structure put to me in these questions, other than to say that if it falls foul of our very rigorous disguised remuneration arrangements—some of them are being put in place by the latest Finance Bill—the people involved should clearly expect to receive a hand on the shoulder from HMRC.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): Does not the publication of these papers show us that this Government are more concerned with hounding disabled people applying for PIP and ESA and taking their disabled motors away from them than with concentrating on the real people dodging paying tax who, as revealed in these papers, are close to the Conservative party? Sort it out!

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Gentleman overlooks a simple fact: this country has one of the most progressive tax systems in the world, with the wealthiest 1% of income tax payers paying no less than 28% of all income tax. As I mentioned earlier, £2.8 billion has been raised from the wealthy who may have been trying to avoid paying their tax. That is a far stronger record than that of the Labour party.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that by far the biggest threat to UK tax revenues is the run on the pound and the flight of capital predicted by the Labour party should it ever get into government?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One measure that the Opposition have said a future Labour Government would take is to stick the corporation tax rate up to 26%, which would do nothing to create jobs, nothing to create wealth, nothing to improve our economy and, most importantly, nothing to raise the vital taxes that we need to support our vital public services.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Given what the Paradise papers reveal about the industrial scale of tax dodging, together with the shaming fact that some of the UK's overseas territories and Crown dependencies are the largest tax havens and secrecy jurisdictions in the world, will the Government drop their morally indefensible blocking of the development of a credible and meaningful EU blacklist of tax havens?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Lady is simply wrong. The discussions on the blacklist at the European Union are ongoing and the United Kingdom Government have done nothing to attempt to block them. We are firmly and deeply engaged in them and expect them to conclude by the end of this year.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): In a world of increasingly global businesses, it is the reality—whether the Labour party likes it or not—that we have to tackle this issue on a global scale. Is that not why it was right that David Cameron used the G7 as a crucial method to tackle it and why it is right that we continue to take an international approach?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We seek to move forward on the basis of unity with our overseas partners. That is why we have played such a full role with the OECD.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): Like me, two thirds of British taxpayers are taxed at source through PAYE. They just cannot understand why anyone would want to put money into a small island like Bermuda, the Cayman Islands or Jersey. The Minister says that there are legitimate reasons for doing so. Will he educate me: what are the legitimate reasons?

**Mel Stride:** As the right hon. Gentleman knows, there are many reasons why individuals use trusts. It may be that I want a trust for my children and I do not want it to be known publicly exactly how that trust will operate, for reasons of confidentiality. People may use overseas trusts because they are looking at dollar-denominated trading and need a jurisdiction in which that occurs. There is a whole variety of reasons. The idea that every time the word “trust” is mentioned it suggests something grubby or illegal is plain wrong.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): With the tax gap at a record low and corporation tax in this country among the lowest in the industrial world, does it not confirm that we have achieved the key balance of a tax system that is both competitive and fair?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is correct. We have brought the corporation tax rate down from 28% to 19%, and it will go down further to 17%. The consequence is that we are raising twice as much corporation tax as we did in 2010.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm what justification there was for voting against Labour's amendments to the Finance Bill last week that sought to curb the number of individuals claiming non-dom status and improve transparency with regards to offshore trusts?

**Mel Stride:** If the hon. Gentleman is referring to the trust arrangements for those who become deemed domiciled as a consequence of this Government deciding to put an end to permanent non-dom status—something that his party never did in its 13 years in office—he will know that all is not quite as the Labour party presents it. Any funds coming out of such trusts will, when they are remitted, fall due to tax by the deemed domiciled individual exactly as they would for any other UK citizen.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): Is it not the case that, with the Criminal Finances Act 2017, the Government have created a new criminal offence for firms that do not stop staff facilitating tax evasion?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is just another example of the 35 additional measures the Government are taking between now and the end of this Parliament to ensure we clamp down on tax avoidance, evasion and non-compliance.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): After nearly a decade of austerity, and with living standards facing their biggest squeeze in nearly a century, the public will, quite rightly, be outraged by the most recent revelations. The Treasury cannot run with both the foxes and the hounds on this, so will it back either the ordinary working people or the super-rich? Which will it be?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Member talks about our having to live within our means, and it is, of course, right that we do that. He talks about the amount of money we need to bring in. What has been most unhelpful is that the previous Labour Government were so ineffective at bringing in tax, the tax gap became so high they cost our country over £40 billion. If they had had the same average level of tax gap in their last seven years in office as we have had in our seven years, we would be about £45 billion better off.

**Kelly Tolhurst** (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Opposition are being disingenuous? They had 13 years and did nothing. They voted against measures to close loops, confirming that only this Government will act to tackle avoidance.

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We hear a lot of talk from the Opposition, but I am afraid that the results of what they did—or, rather, what they did not do—when they had their turn in office speak for themselves.

**Jack Dromey** (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Does the Minister not recognise that it is obscene that rich people should seek to get even richer by salting away their billions in offshore bank accounts, while working people suffer the longest stagnation of wages for 150 years?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Member will know that the wealthy of this country pay their fair share. The 1% most wealthy income tax payers pay 28% of all income tax. What was the figure under the previous Labour Government? It was below 24%, so I will take no lectures from him.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): When I sat on the Public Accounts Committee, we used to hear about mechanisms such as the “double Irish” and the “Dutch sandwich”, neither of which are UK jurisdictions. Does the Minister agree that measures such as the diverted profit tax will help to put to an end to some of the tricks that can be used to move profits from this jurisdiction into lower tax jurisdictions?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The diverted profits tax works every day of the week. It works where HMRC has to step in and sort out the companies that fall foul of it, but it works even better than that: it prevents and deters many, many companies from behaving in an inappropriate fashion.

**Stella Creasy** (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister says that HMRC is now seeking to investigate this matter. Ahead of the Budget, when I suspect the Government may wish to make some public spending commitments, will the Minister commit to a moratorium while this matter is being investigated on any public contracts going to companies that have offshore trusts?

**Mel Stride:** I am not going to get into the business of providing moratoriums on any particular matter at the Dispatch Box, tempting though the hon. Lady’s suggestion may be. That is not a path I am going to go down.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I want to highlight the new criminal offence we have created for firms that do not stop their staff facilitating tax evasion. For the first time, under the Criminal Finances Act 2017, companies will be held criminally liable if they fail to stop their employees facilitating tax evasion. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this truly demonstrates that the Government take tax avoidance extremely seriously, and, indeed, have done more than our colleagues on the Opposition Benches have ever done?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is but one further example of making companies criminally responsible where their employees try to facilitate tax avoidance. That is the right way to go and is just another measure the Government have brought in.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that the scale of aggressive avoidance exposed by these revelations shows that the general anti-abuse rule introduced in 2013 is not working and that what we need is general anti-avoidance legislation so that there is no room for doubt and no room for manoeuvre?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Gentleman talks about the amount revealed by these disclosures, and I assume he is centring his remarks on the half-hour television programme last night. The reality is that we do not yet know exactly the extent of what will be revealed, which is why HMRC has asked those with the data to make it

available—so that we can use it to get on with the job of cracking down on those who might not have behaved as they should.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): The Minister has confirmed that we have one of the lowest tax gaps in the world, yet the Labour party still complains. How does today’s position compare to the one we inherited in 2010?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is right to point out the difference. The tax gap today is 6%, which is about the lowest in the world and the lowest in the history of our country. As I said earlier, if we had had the same average tax gap as Labour during its term in office, we would be more than £40 billion out of pocket—less money, as the shadow Chancellor put it, for the nurses, the doctors, the paramedics, the police, the Army and the others in our public services.

**Catherine West** (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): There are some things we do know, however: some large accounting firms are being investigated for poor practice that assists and colludes in tax avoidance and evasion. Will the Minister clarify what will be done to clamp down on those who collude with those who do not want to do the right thing?

**Mel Stride:** The Finance Bill, which has just gone through the House, contains important provisions to clamp down on those who enable tax avoidance—the category of individual and company to which the hon. Lady refers—and those are some pretty stiff penalties.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm my understanding that the profits of the Duchy of Lancaster are used exclusively for official purposes, that its investment board is at arm’s length from the Government and that if anyone wants to question who was overseeing the investment board at the time of any suspicious transactions, they should go and see the Labour Ministers at the time?

**Mel Stride:** The accounts of the Duchy of Lancaster are readily available, transparent and audited in the normal fashion, and there has been no suggestion to date, as far as I am aware and certainly not in the television programme last night, of any mischief related to any aspect of its dealings.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the Minister confirm that according to the latest figures available there are 420 employees in HMRC’s high net worth unit and 3,765 employees in the Department for Work and Pensions chasing social security fraud? Does he agree with many of us in the House—if those figures are correct—that if the same resources were applied to tax evasion we would have billions of pounds more for our vital public services?

**Mel Stride:** I can confirm that in 2015 an additional £800 million was made available to HMRC for the purposes of bearing down on tax avoidance and evasion, and that that is expected by 2021-22 to bring in more than £7 billion in additional revenue.

**Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My constituents are rightly angry about tax evasion and avoidance, but they are also angry about the avoidance of action, as exemplified under the last Labour Government, who talked tough but did very little. Will the Minister remind me how many times this Government have acted and how many more times they are likely to act?

**Mel Stride:** My hon. Friend is right. We know how much we have brought in through clamping down on avoidance and evasion: £160 billion since 2010. We also know that we have about the lowest tax gap in the world and that it is far lower than it was under the last Labour Government. Those figures speak for themselves.

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): Further to the Minister's response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), will he explain why he thinks people saving for their children's future would need to make use of accounts in Bermuda and the British Virgin Islands, when my constituents seem to manage it with the use of local building societies?

**Mel Stride:** I think that if the hon. Lady checks my answer to the question from her right hon. Friend in *Hansard*, she will see that that was not the totality of my response, and that I also referred to dollar-denominated trading and the complexities thereof. She may then be able to answer her own question.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): According to the Government's assessment, how many UK citizens and how many UK-registered companies have these offshore accounts, and how much money has the UK, as represented by those two entities, got salted away in them?

**Mel Stride:** As the hon. Gentleman will know, those are not figures that I have at my fingertips. As he will also know, confidential arrangements are rightly in place in many of the structures to which he refers; indeed, he, and perhaps even the headquarters of his party, might even be held within one of those arrangements. Of necessity, that particular information is not fully available.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Will the Minister clarify his understanding of the position in respect of non-doms donating to political parties in the UK? In the interests of transparency, will he arrange for all parties to publish lists of non-doms who have donated to their parties?

**Mel Stride:** As the right hon. Gentleman will know, there are requirements relating to transparency and donations to political parties, and the Government have put an end to permanent non-dom status.

**Thelma Walker** (Colne Valley) (Lab): My constituents in the Colne and Holme valleys pay their tax in the usual way. Can the Minister explain to them why their public services are being cut while the rich are using tax havens to avoid paying their fair share?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Lady may know from my earlier comments that the wealthiest 1% in the country pay 28% of all income tax. She should also be aware that in 2010, during her party's time in office, the proportion was only about 23%. Ours is the party that is standing

up for the poorest and the least well off in our society, and as part of that process we have taken almost 4 million of the lowest-paid out of tax altogether.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister, and the Government, consider writing a letter to all those mentioned in the Paradise papers news leaks, gently reminding them of not only their financial obligations but their moral obligations to all citizens of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**Mel Stride:** I totally agree with the hon. Gentleman that everyone has a moral obligation to pay their fair and legally due share of tax, and when it is found as a consequence of these disclosures that some have failed to do so, HMRC will be on their case.

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): Last year my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) led work in the Public Accounts Committee, and called for country-by-country reporting in an amendment to the Finance Bill, to which I think the Minister has alluded. The Government can now lead the way throughout the world in implementing that provision, while still pursuing multilateral provisions.

**Mel Stride:** The Government are leading the way in exactly that endeavour. As I said earlier, a very important point to note is that we have a multilateral approach to this issue, and we are working hard at delivering on it.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Most people have not heard of dollar-denominated trading, but they look at this matter and see one rule for the rich and powerful and another for the weak and vulnerable. Surely the way to lance this boil is to provide full transparency, which means making information publicly available rather than people having to ask about British overseas territories.

**Mel Stride:** I have explained about the transparency that we need. We need to ensure that HMRC obtains the information that it requires to satisfy itself that the dealings in those territories are being carried out appropriately, and that is exactly the position that we are working towards at present.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Last week I met some of the representatives of our overseas territories. A number of them said that their governance was not working for them, and that they had little say in defence and foreign affairs. Is there not a win-win here? Could we not give our overseas territories representation in this place, and then enforce tax and public transparency in those territories? Taxation with representation, all equal under the law: surely that is a clarion call for all of us here today.

**Mel Stride:** I hope the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not start to opine on the constitutional settlement we have with our overseas territories and Crown dependencies, but I will make one important point that relates to the issue he has raised: we must not forget that they do not have representation in our Parliament, and we therefore have particular responsibilities in listening to them and co-operating with them, rather than, as he perhaps suggests, coercing them.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Minister arrange for full details of the merits of sending money offshore to be published, so that my constituents in Hull, many of whom are low-paid but pay their taxes, can see whether it would be appropriate for them to go offshore?

**Mel Stride:** The most important message for the hon. Lady's constituents is the merits of getting on top of tax avoidance, evasion and non-compliance, which is exactly what this Government have done, and which is in turn raising the vital taxes for our public services so we can have the kind of public services that are a hallmark of a civilised society.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): We probably need a time-out for a fact check on the £6 billion tax gap figure that the Minister is consistently quoting. May I refer him to the private Member's Bill promoted by the former right hon. Member Michael Meacher, which set out detailed plans for a general principle on tax avoidance? We can get around a rule, but we cannot get around a principle; that seems to me to be a solid and sensible way forward.

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Gentleman referred to a £6 billion tax gap, but the figure is not £6 billion; it is 6% of all tax that should be collected. On his suggestion that there should be a general principle or general rule, there is already a general anti-avoidance rule for exactly the purpose to which the hon. Gentleman has alluded.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Over 100,000 properties in the UK, worth over £122 billion, are owned by overseas-registered UK companies in the British Virgin Islands and the Channel Islands, and that represents a conservatively estimated £2 billion in tax avoidance a year, enough to close the benefits fraud gap in one fell swoop. That is just a conservative estimate, however, and a third of the properties in the Land Registry do not even have property transaction data. Does the Minister agree that now is an opportune

moment to grip the Land Registry and ensure it has compulsory registration of land and property in the UK, with the full structure of ownership and their value, so we can understand the full scale of the exploitation of UK land and property for tax avoidance purposes?

**Mel Stride:** This Government have brought far more property into the scope of taxation than the hon. Gentleman's party ever did in 13 years in office, so I will not take any lectures on that point from him. [*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I would not want the hon. Member for Eltham to get uber-excited; I call Mr Clive Efford.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Minister has set out the reasons why the eye-wateringly rich would benefit from a tax haven, but how would my average taxpayer in Eltham benefit from a tax haven and why should they tolerate this in overseas British territories?

**Mel Stride:** The hon. Gentleman characterises those involved in overseas trusts as eye-wateringly rich, but I do not think all of them are; there are many pension funds, and there will be many who rely on those pension funds to live, and many of them might, indeed, live in his constituency. I think this general characterisation of it all being about super-wealthy people and all being about tax dodgers and so forth is rather crude, and, frankly, not worthy of the Opposition.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): Some 130,000 UK companies have not completed their persons with significant control registers, and not one of them has been fined. If we cannot get our own house in order, how can we credibly ask others to act on transparency?

**Mel Stride:** I am happy to look into the specific point the hon. Gentleman has raised and will come back to him on it.

## Points of Order

4.24 pm

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In oral questions earlier today, the Secretary of State for Education told the House about her first-class degree in economics. She went on to state that Labour's spending plans would lead to school budgets being "absolutely frozen" in cash terms. I might not have an economics degree, but I am sure that those at the Institute for Fiscal Studies have a few between them, and they have said that our spending plans would

"reverse real-terms cuts to spending per pupil since 2015 over the course of the next parliament"

with an increase of about £4.8 billion. I am sure that the Secretary of State did not intend to mislead the House, Mr Speaker, but can you advise me on how I can seek a retraction or correction of that remark for the record?

**Mr Speaker:** I would say to the shadow Secretary of State that every Member of this House is responsible for the veracity of what he or she says to it. If a Member believes that he or she has made a mistake, that Member has a responsibility to correct the record. However, I would point out, both for Members of the House and for all others interested in our proceedings, that sometimes these matters are, let me put it this way, notably political and that there are issues of interpretation and of argument—notwithstanding the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), shaking her head and frowning at me in a mildly censorious manner. That nevertheless remains the case. If I did not know the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) better, I would think that she was using the device of a point of order in a rather bogus way to continue the debate that had been taking place in Education questions. However, because I know her as well as I do, I cannot believe that she would be guilty of such impropriety and opportunism.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab)  
*rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** I am saving the hon. Gentleman up; he is too precious to waste at this early stage of the proceedings.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During the urgent question just now, I asked the Financial Secretary to the Treasury for some information pertaining to the levels of usage of offshore accounts. He said that he was unable to put his hands on that kind of information immediately. Is there a mechanism whereby I could prevail upon him to find that information and to put it in the Library? Or is there perhaps a way in which you might assist us to enable that to happen?

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who has taken his opportunity. If the Minister genuinely did not have the information to hand, but would otherwise be willing to provide it, he might think it a collegiate thing to do to provide it, either to the hon. Gentleman or to all Members by a deposit in the Library of the House. But the Minister is not under any obligation to do that. He has always struck me as an agreeable fellow,

however, and he might well think that that is an agreeable thing to do, but if he does not, it is not a matter for Chair sanction. The hon. Gentleman has an indomitable spirit, and I sense that if he does not get what he wants, he will be beetling into the Table Office and tabling a flurry of questions to the Minister, which the Minister might find it rather irksome to have to answer. The Minister might therefore think that the simpler course would be to lob the material in the hon. Gentleman's direction, and that that might provide due satisfaction.

**Matthew Pennycook:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Following last week's passing of a motion of unopposed return relating to the sectoral impact assessments carried out by the Department for Exiting the European Union, the Secretary of State has this afternoon written to the Chair of the Brexit Select Committee to say that "it is not the case that 58 sectoral impact assessments exist."

This is despite the fact that the Government have published a list of those 58 sectors. He adds in his letter that

"it will take my Department...time to collate and bring together this information in a way that is accessible and informative for the Committee."

Mr Speaker, you made it clear last week that precedent suggested that the motion was binding and effective, but I am concerned that the Government are not treating that motion or the House with the required respect or seriousness. Is it still your opinion that this is a matter that should be deliberated on over a period of days? If, as appears to be the case, the Government are going to take weeks to provide the information, what more can the House do to expedite the matter? Finally, is it your opinion that there is a case for the Secretary of State coming to the House tomorrow to explain the Department's handling of this matter?

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point of order and for his characteristic courtesy in giving me advance notice of it. The motion passed on Wednesday obliges Ministers to provide the Exiting the European Union Committee with the impact assessments arising from sector analyses. That should be done very promptly indeed. Failing that, I expect Ministers to explain to the House before we rise tomorrow evening why they have not provided them and when they propose to do so.

I should say, and will out of courtesy to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and for the information of the House, that the Secretary of State has contacted me to say that the Government will comply with the ruling from the Chair and, by implication, with the outcome of the uncontested vote by providing the material. Moreover, before I had even contemplated whether to ask for it—I had not asked for it there and then—the Secretary of State offered me an indication of likely timescale. That was by way of him informing me, but informing me of an outline plan is one thing—I do not cavil at the Secretary of State for doing that—but informing the House is another, and the obligation is to the House.

The House's interest in this will be protected by the Brexit Committee, which is chaired by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), who was elected by the whole House. I know that if he considers that his Committee, and by extension the whole House, is not being treated with due respect, he will not be slow to alert the House and to seek redress. We may have to

return to this matter very soon. My feeling is that the best course of action is for the Government to set out in terms and in public their intended modus operandi and timescale. As I say, that must happen before we rise tomorrow.

**Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be in order for Members of this place to see a copy of the letter to compare it with *Hansard*? Although I did not sit in for the entire debate, I sat in for 90% of it, and I do not recollect any Minister saying that there were not 58 papers or that it would take them a long time to collate them in any event. It would help us to compare *Hansard* with the contents of the letter.

**Mr Speaker:** The answer to the right hon. Lady, to whom I am grateful for her further point of order, is that that matter is in the hands of the Secretary of State. He wrote to the Chair of the Brexit Committee and, perfectly courteously and properly, copied me in on that correspondence. Whether the Secretary of State wishes to furnish a copy to the right hon. Lady is a matter for him. Now, he may readily do so, as the Secretary of State is a fearless fellow, ex-SAS and all the rest of it, but he may view the right hon. Lady—I say this in all courtesy and as a mark of respect—with considerable trepidation. I do not know. That is a matter for the Secretary of State to judge. He may wish to release the letter, but I rather imagine, knowing the right hon. Lady, she will discover the contents of that letter by one means or t'other. I think we will leave it there for now.

If there are no further points of order and if the appetite has been satisfied, at least for today, we come to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and his statement.

## Grenfell Recovery Taskforce

4.33 pm

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the independent recovery taskforce that is working with the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in the wake of June's tragic fire at Grenfell Tower.

The people of North Kensington have been failed by those who were supposed to serve them. They were failed by a system that allowed the fire to happen. They were failed once again by a sluggish and chaotic response in the immediate aftermath. It was clear that if RBKC was to get a grip on the situation and begin to regain the trust of residents, it would have to change and change quickly. That started with a change in leadership of the council, new senior officers, and new support brought in from other councils and from central Government.

To ensure that that translated into a better service for the victims and for the people of North Kensington and to assure myself that the council would be capable of delivery, I announced on 5 July that I was sending in a specialist independent taskforce. The taskforce is made up of experts in housing, local government, public services and community engagement. I deliberately appointed independent-minded individuals who will not hesitate to speak their mind.

I have now received the first report from the taskforce, reflecting on its first nine weeks on the ground. The report has been shared with the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). I will be placing copies in the Library of the House, and the report will be published in full on gov.uk.

It is clear from the report that progress is being made, that much-needed change has happened and continues to happen, that the council today is a very different organisation from the one that failed its people so badly back in June, and that the taskforce is satisfied that RBKC, under its new leadership, recognises the challenges it faces and is committed to delivering a comprehensive recovery programme. For that reason, the taskforce does not see any practical advantage in further intervention at this time as it would risk further disruption.

Although there are green shoots, the report pulls no punches about the fact that there is still significant room for improvement. The taskforce has identified four key areas in which the council needs to step up. The first is pace. The speed of delivery needs to be increased, and more work needs to be done more quickly. The second is innovation. The scale and impact of the fire was unprecedented in recent history, but RBKC is relying too much on tried and tested solutions that are not up to the task. The council should be much bolder in its response.

The third area is skills. Too many of the officers and councillors working on the response lack specialist training in how to work with a traumatised community—that needs to change. The final area, and arguably the most important, is the need for greater empathy and emotional intelligence. The people of Grenfell Tower, Grenfell Walk and the wider community have already suffered so much, yet the taskforce has heard too many accounts of that suffering being compounded by bureaucratic processes that are not appropriate when so many deeply traumatised men,

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women and children have complex individual needs. A greater degree of humanity must be put at the heart of all RBKC's recovery work.

I have discussed those recommendations with the council's leadership, which accepted them all without question. Culture change is never quick or easy to achieve in any organisation, but I am in no doubt that the leadership and staff of RBKC genuinely want to do better. It is their community, too, and they desperately want to help it heal. I am particularly encouraged that the council is now drawing on NHS expertise to secure specific training for the frontline staff responsible for providing direct support to survivors.

I have assured the council that I will continue to support it in building capacity. However, I have also made it clear that my support will not be uncritical or unqualified. I expect to see swift, effective action to deal with all the issues highlighted in the report. I am not taking any options off the table if progress is not made, and I will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Until now, one aspect of the monitoring has involved weekly meetings, chaired by me, bringing together Ministers from across Government and senior colleagues from RBKC. Although the meetings have proved effective, the taskforce expressed concern that meeting so often is beginning to become counterproductive and that the time required to prepare properly is cutting into the time available for frontline work. As a result, the report recommends that we meet less often, and I have accepted that recommendation. However, I reassure the House that that does not mean our priorities are shifting elsewhere or that the level of scrutiny is being reduced. It is simply a matter of ensuring time and resources are focused to the maximum on those affected by the fire.

One area to which the House knows I have been paying particularly close attention is the rehousing of those who lost their home in the fire. Although I have always been clear that rehousing must proceed at a pace that respects the needs, wants and situations of survivors, I have been equally adamant that bureaucratic inertia must not add delay. Clearly some progress is being made. The latest figures I have received from RBKC are that 122 households out of a current total of 204 have accepted an offer of either temporary or permanent accommodation. Seventy-three of those households have now moved in, of which 47 have moved into temporary accommodation and 26 have moved into permanent accommodation.

However, the report is also clear that that the process is simply not moving as quickly as it should. RBKC's latest figures show that 131 Grenfell households are still living in emergency accommodation. Behind every one of these numbers are human faces. There can be no doubt that there are families who desperately want a new home but for whom progress has been painfully slow. Almost five months after the fire, this must improve. Responsibility for re-homing ultimately lies with RBKC. However, in central Government we cannot shy away from our share of the responsibility. I expect the council, in line with the taskforce's report, to do whatever is necessary to ensure households can move into settled homes as swiftly as possible. I will continue to do all I can to ensure that this is done.

When I announced the creation of the taskforce, I said it would stay in place for as long as it was needed. Based on this first report, there is still much more to be done, so the taskforce will remain for the foreseeable future. I have asked the taskforce to ensure that proper action is taken on all the fronts it identifies, and to come back to me in the new year with a further update, which I will, of course, share with this House. I must, of course, thank the four members of the taskforce for their tireless efforts so far: Aftab Chughtai, Javed Khan, Jane Scott and Chris Wood.

This weekend, I read the Right Rev. James Jones's excellent report on the appalling experiences of those who lost loved ones in the Hillsborough disaster. It is a sobering piece of work, reminding us that

"the way in which families bereaved through public tragedy are treated by those in authority is in itself a burning injustice".

We saw that all too clearly in the hours and days after the Grenfell fire. The clock cannot be turned back; the woeful inadequacies of the early response cannot be undone. But I can say, once again, that as long as I am in public life, I will do all I can to ensure that the failures of the past are not repeated, and that the people of Grenfell Tower get the help and support they deserve. The Hillsborough families had to fight for a quarter of a century to get their voices heard, to be taken seriously, to be treated properly by those in authority—we cannot allow that to happen again. I will not allow that to happen again. The public inquiry established by the Prime Minister will play the major role, but, for its part, I am confident that the continued work of the taskforce will also help ensure that the survivors receive the support and respect they deserve.

4.42 pm

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for the advance copy of his statement this afternoon. I also wish to join him in thanking the members of the Grenfell taskforce for producing this report. On all sides of the House, we recognised the totally avoidable tragedy at Grenfell and an official response that was just not good enough. The support on the ground for families who needed help or basic information in the initial hours was not provided by the council. The council was too distant from the residents it serves, which meant there was little effective and structured support from the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea at a time when its residents needed it the most. Instead, support came from the many volunteers, charities, emergency services and aid workers. As we all know only too well, without them the situation would have been much worse.

For many survivors, the situation is far bleaker than the information provided to us today by the Secretary of State would suggest. First, will he confirm that the figures that have been presented do not include people from the properties surrounding the tower, in the three walkway buildings? Residents of Barandon Walk, Hurstway Walk and Testerton Walk did not run out of a burning building, but they still lived through an unimaginable tragedy and they still saw unspeakable things. My understanding from the council's figures is that if we are to include these additional people made homeless from the fire, we find that: 376 households were made homeless—comprising 857 people; 311 of these households are in bed and breakfast accommodation; and 87 households are in temporary accommodation. In future, will the

Secretary of State provide the full data when he updates the House, including a full account of the numbers made homeless and the progress made in rehousing the survivors?

There are additional issues for those in the walkway blocks, because under the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea's suggested rehousing policy, tenants would not be given priority for rehousing while they remained in bed and breakfast accommodation. Residents have accused the council of insensitivity, and I agree with them. The policy would mean that they would be required to move either into temporary accommodation or back into their old home overlooking the tower, where they would have to relive the tragedy every day. Even then, priority for housing would be removed if residents reject two offers. That has left some residents fearing that they will be made intentionally homeless. Hotel accommodation is not a substitute for a home, especially after such a traumatic event, and there are growing concerns about people beginning to lose hope.

Dr John Green, the clinical director of the Grenfell Tower NHS mental health response team, said last week that he had found that 667 adults were in urgent need of treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder. Three hundred and sixty are undergoing treatment. The capacity issues in the NHS that we often see nationwide are amplified locally at times of tragedy such as this, as the taskforce notes, describing support services as "stretched". Survivors have reported issues with appropriateness, accessibility and lack of cultural and faith sensitivity. Fundamental problems remain, with NHS staff unable to get timely and accurate location lists from the council. Will the Secretary of State recognise that the effects of this tragedy go beyond those who were in the tower and ensure that steps are taken to make sure that severely traumatised people have the support they need and do not face an unnecessary burden in finding somewhere safe to live?

The Government conceded that the failure of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea was real and sent in the taskforce, yet they also left the council in charge—something that the Opposition strongly cautioned against. We welcome the taskforce's four key findings as a way to begin to rebuild public trust in the council. The Secretary of State says that he will continue to monitor the situation closely, but although I understand the reasons why he has announced that there will be fewer meetings between his Ministers, the council and the taskforce, how will he then ensure that the level of scrutiny that is so desperately needed will not be reduced?

It is worth noting that, by contrast with the taskforce's findings and the Secretary of State's comments today, the leader of the council, Councillor Campbell, last week praised the council's response, describing its efforts in the immediate response as "incredible". Frankly, I find that comment incredible. Notwithstanding the taskforce's view of a significant change in the senior leadership team, it appears that little has changed in the gap between the council leadership and the communities it seeks to represent. The council is still far too distant.

Children are still being failed by the council. Two hundred and twenty-seven children are still in temporary accommodation following the fire. Although not all of them will have been there for nearly five months, some will have been, and the Secretary of State will of course

be aware of the six-week legal limit on emergency bed and breakfast accommodation for families with children. The taskforce recognised as much in its report, describing a "distinct weakness in the response"

of the council. Will the Secretary of State please clarify whether it is his view that the council has failed in its statutory obligations to its residents, and to the 227 children still in emergency accommodation? If he does, what further action will he be taking against the council and, more urgently, to help families?

We are 145 days on since the dreadful fire, yet it still appears that many of the promises that were so hastily made are still not being actioned quickly enough. Without the full use of the Secretary of State's powers to rectify the inadequate governance arrangements at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, there is still a long way to go before the local community will feel any trust in its council again.

**Sajid Javid:** First, may I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and welcome his support for the members of the taskforce?

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues. Let me begin with rehousing. He talked about the walkways. I am sure that he will understand that, from day one, the priority for rehousing has been the victims—those who have permanently lost their homes—of Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk. At the same time, work has been going on with many of those in the walkways whose homes were initially uninhabitable. Many of them also required other support, including emotional and mental health support.

The council and others have been working with people in the walkways, providing them with whatever support is needed. The hon. Gentleman said that a number of people from the walkways are still in emergency accommodation—hotel rooms and so on. The latest information that I have is that there are currently 161 hotel rooms being occupied by residents of the walkways. There were many more—I think that, at one point, it was closer to 300 rooms—so, thankfully, the number is coming down. Many people have moved back to their homes. Some have said that they are not ready to move back, or, in some cases, that they do not want to move back. The council has quite rightly said that, if anyone from the walkways does not want to move back to their previous accommodation, they should be listened to. No one should be forced to move back. The council is working with many others to get them into temporary and permanent accommodation as quickly as possible.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raised the issue of emotional support. That is one of the most important areas of support for people—whether they were from Grenfell Tower/Grenfell Walk, the walkways or the larger community. That is where the NHS, the clinical commissioning group, other councils and voluntary groups have been involved. He will know that there has been considerable support on offer: a 24/7 dedicated NHS hotline; a number of outreach efforts in which almost 4,000 contacts have been made; emotional support in 13 hotels, much of it available throughout the night; and funding for community groups, including religious groups and others, to ensure that support can be provided in all ways to all members of the community.

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A couple of weeks ago, I requested that we set up a roundtable meeting with voluntary groups, the NHS and others who have been providing support to ensure that we looked at all options of support and provided it in every way that we could. That meeting was held and a report came back to me last week through the ministerial taskforce that I chair. We have taken up any recommendation that was made to make sure that we are providing all the emotional support that we possibly can.

The hon. Gentleman was quite right to highlight support for children. He will know that, in its rehousing policy, the council consulted survivors and set up a consultation process. A priority system is in place. I am sure that he understands that the priority for permanent homes are those families who have been bereaved—whether or not they have children—and then those families with children. There is also support for educational services. He may know that the Kensington Aldridge Academy, which had been affected by the fire, was rebuilt as a temporary building and reopened again, on time, in September. As far as I know, that is the fastest school building programme that has ever been achieved. I just mention it as a demonstration of how far we need to go to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support the council, the Department for Education and others in helping the children.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the findings of the taskforce report and specifically asked me how we maintain scrutiny. Let me make it clear that all members of the taskforce were independent and therefore independently-minded in their approach. It was important to listen to the taskforce's recommendations and, most importantly, to act on them. The council is publishing a report today, and I am glad that it is making it clear that it has accepted every single recommendation from the members of the taskforce. I have also accepted every recommendation that applies to central Government.

One recommendation was that the ministerial taskforce I chair should meet less frequently for the reasons that I outlined in my statement, and I have accepted the reasons given by the taskforce. To ignore it would not have been the right approach. Having said that, it is absolutely right that we maintain scrutiny so the ministerial taskforce will continue to meet, but the hon. Gentleman knows that Department for Communities and Local Government officers are also working with the council, taskforce members and others. The work of the taskforce continues, as it regularly meets the council, council officers and community representatives. The hon. Gentleman will know that the fire Minister is also the Grenfell victims Minister and meets the victims almost weekly, and that the Minister for Housing and Planning has regular surgeries with the victims.

**Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): I chair the board of a housing association in the west midlands, so fire safety is clearly at the top of my agenda. I recently met Brian Sofley of ASSA ABLOY UK to talk about his recommendations to improve fire door safety. Will my right hon. Friend update us on the progress of the independent review into building regulations and fire safety?

**Sajid Javid:** The review's work has begun, and there was a call for evidence from Dame Judith Hackitt, the leader of the review. I believe that she has received

almost 300 responses to that call for evidence, much of which will be about fire safety. I have not seen any of that work at this point—rightly, because it is an independent review—but I know that Dame Judith is looking very carefully at the issues, including fire doors.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. I join him and the shadow Secretary of State in thanking the taskforce members for their work. The report rightly recognises that the people of Grenfell and north Kensington were utterly failed, including by a sluggish and chaotic response in the aftermath of disaster.

I have questions on two issues, the first of which is rehousing. I share the utter dismay at what the report calls a “painfully slow” speed of progress. The Secretary of State has rightly recognised that his Government must not shy away from a share of responsibility, so is he satisfied that there are sufficient staff working on, and sufficient resources being invested in, rehousing? Are families having sufficient opportunities to meet staff face to face to discuss options, rather than being left alone to search for possible opportunities? What support will the Government provide for increased housing costs, if that is what it takes to find and secure suitable accommodation? The Secretary of State will be aware that there have been criticisms of the nature of some housing offers. Will he tell us how many offers have been refused because properties were located too far from a family's previous home, and how many have been refused as being unsuitable?

On the immigration amnesty, it is welcome that the Home Office has strengthened what was previously a miserly offer to now include at least the prospect of indefinite leave. But why not simply allow for indefinite leave right now? Surely that is the only way to ensure that all undocumented survivors feel able and safe to take up the support that they so desperately need. Surely that is, quite simply, the right thing to do in these tragic circumstances.

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman asks whether I am satisfied that there are enough resources and staff for rehousing. All the resources that the council needs for rehousing are in place, including support from other councils and from the Government. It is not an issue of there not being enough people on the ground to work on housing needs. Cost is also not an issue at all. The council has already made some £230 million of its reserves available to acquire new properties. It has significantly increased the number of new permanent properties it has acquired—the figure is now more than 300—and it will continue to add to that list for the foreseeable weeks and months ahead.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the immigration system changes that we announced to help the victims of Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk. The Immigration Minister's recent announcement was welcome. It is the right and proportionate response, which gives the families certainty and comfort.

**James Cleverly** (Braintree) (Con): Hopefully, the tragedy at Grenfell Tower will provide us with opportunities to learn some serious lessons. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the lessons learned about the immediate response and about working with volunteers, as well as

the lessons that the taskforce harvests, are circulated to other local authorities via London councils and the Local Government Association and to the London Resilience Forum and other local resilience forums, so that we never have such a sluggish response again to a tragedy of this scale?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree very much with my hon. Friend—when it comes to London governance, he speaks with great experience. One of the lessons learned from this tragedy will certainly be the need to help all councils—not just those in London—with their resilience and response in any civilian emergency they might face, and that process is certainly going on.

**Stephen Pound** (Ealing North) (Lab): The Secretary of State is rightly concentrating on the human face and the human cost of this tragedy, and I pay credit to him for that. However, the structure is also important. Every day, thousands upon thousands of people on the Hammersmith and City line and on Western Avenue have to see this smoke-blackened vertical charnel house—this modern Gormenghast—jutting into the sky. Some local people are saying to me that they would like the building to be dropped and for some sort of memorial park to be built there, perhaps. Others are saying that when the building is no longer a crime scene it must be made habitable again. Does the Secretary of State have a view, and, more importantly, does he intend to consult the local community on the long-term use of the site of Grenfell Tower?

**Sajid Javid:** What happens to the site is a very important, but also very sensitive, issue. What ultimately matters is not my view—or the hon. Gentleman's, if I may say so—but the views of the community, and particularly the survivors. The survivors are being consulted, and that consultation will continue. My view is that nothing should happen to the site until survivors far and wide have been consulted and their views properly taken into account. There is a difference of views among survivors—that has come out recently in some engagement the council has had—but it is important to keep up that engagement and to listen to the survivors carefully.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, I applaud the meticulous approach that the Secretary of State has taken and the insightful report he has brought to the Chamber today—a great deal of work has gone into it. One area that is highlighted is the need for better skills in the council. Will he outline what skills ought to be used to deliver and to help in the aftermath of this tragedy and what the Government are doing to help?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. She is right that one of the key recommendations of the taskforce's members concerns skills. They talked about skills in some detail: they highlighted not just having appropriate skills training for the officers of the council, but making sure, for example, that councillors, as well as some of their key officers, have had training in emotional support services. That is one of the most important takeaways from this report, and I am pleased that the council has fully accepted this and the other recommendations.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): It breaks my heart that many of these people—over two thirds of them—will not be housed by Christmas. Given that the taskforce has found the council to be so inept, is it not

right that the Secretary of State should have brought in commissioners? What guarantees can he now give these families that they will be housed? The general tone of today's statement has lacked the urgency and compassion that are still required.

**Sajid Javid:** The right hon. Gentleman raises the importance of housing and rehousing, and that is absolutely right—those are a priority here. If I may say so, I do not agree with his recommendation. To have brought in commissioners would have made what is already a tough situation even more difficult in terms of helping the victims of this tragedy. I ask him to reflect on the fact that whatever happens in terms of housing, it must be led by the victims.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, there were 151 households in Grenfell Tower and Grenfell Walk, and there are now 204 households to deal with because many of them have wanted to change their family structure, and that has been listened to. It is very, very important that the rehousing is done at the pace of the victims, that they are given choices, and that if they are not happy with any of those choices, they are given more choices. That process continues. No family should be forced to leave emergency accommodation; they should leave it only when they are happy with what has been offered. It is right that we listen to the victims during the whole rehousing process.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I was very pleased to hear that the council has accepted the taskforce's recommendations in full, but how quickly will those recommendations be implemented, and what oversight will there be?

**Sajid Javid:** The council accepted the recommendations very quickly; it did not take too much time to consider them. It had a meeting, went through them, and accepted every single one. That is a good start. As for how the implementation will be monitored, first, the taskforce itself will help to oversee it and report back to me again in the new year, but also, through my Department and my officials, I will oversee each one of the recommendations and make sure they are fulfilled.

**Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State outline what is being done for those suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder following this tragedy and explain how they are being fully supported?

**Sajid Javid:** Psychosocial support—emotional support—is one of the most important things being offered, through the NHS, voluntary services and other organisations. I wanted to make sure that everything that is being done is appropriate and being offered at pace. That is why I held a recent roundtable attended by a Health Minister and by the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, who is the Grenfell victims' Minister, to make sure that we are reaching out in every way we possibly can. This needs to be kept under review because needs change over time, and I am determined to do that.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): Can the Secretary of State confirm that those affected directly and indirectly by the tragedy are being properly listened to? Are Ministers in regular contact both with individuals and groups?

**Sajid Javid:** Yes, I can confirm that. Of course, those people must be listened to by the council and by any other providers of public services, including central Government—my Department and others. My hon. Friend the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service is the Minister for Grenfell victims and regularly meets victims in the wider community. My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning also regularly meets community members and others on rehousing needs, and I regularly have such meetings myself.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** I welcome the Secretary of State saying, “as long as I am in public life, I will do all I can to ensure that the failures of the past are not repeated”, but had we learned the lessons from the Lakanal fire, we would have done so before this tragedy happened. One of the recommendations is that where fire safety officers recommend it, sprinklers should be retrofitted. We have the Budget coming up in a couple of weeks’ time. Will the Secretary of State make representations to the Chancellor to make funds available to local authorities to fit sprinklers in tower blocks?

**Sajid Javid:** I have already told the House that in terms of the fire safety work that is required for other social buildings, whatever work is deemed essential by the respective council or housing authority should be carried out, and the Government will provide support and flexibility to make sure that it is.

**James Cartledge (South Suffolk) (Con):** My right hon. Friend was right to say that the victims of this terrible fire were let down by the system, but that is potentially also true of those who still reside in high-rise blocks that may have been fitted with substandard cladding. Will he update us on the very important building regs review and explain how that is going to help us understand how these inappropriate fittings took place in the first instance?

**Sajid Javid:** In the first instance, we have been getting advice from the expert panel, which was set up days after the tragedy, on any immediate action that we need to take. That has included the work that has already been done to test buildings and to test some of the systems panels. The wider lessons for building regulations and fire safety are the subject of the work being done at the moment by Dame Judith Hackitt. I expect an interim report within weeks, and we will look to act on that report before we receive her final report.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** I note that the Secretary of State did not update us today on the progress of the testing regime. Will he provide a further update on that, in terms not just of our important high-rise residential blocks, but of other public buildings including hospitals, schools and perhaps shopping centres?

**Sajid Javid:** The reason why I did not cover that in my statement is that it was about the response to the taskforce report, but I am happy to give the hon. Lady some more information now. As far as social housing buildings—that is, social housing towers of more than 18 metres high—are concerned, 169 have been tested through the building safety programme, and 162 of those have failed the test. I believe that that is the last update; nothing has changed since the previous update

that I gave to the House. She also asked me about other public buildings. Fifteen public buildings, 60 private buildings and 26 student residential buildings have been tested and failed.

**Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con):** Sir Martin Moore-Bick asked the Government to look at wider social housing issues, and I am pleased that the Government accepted that recommendation. To build on his answer to the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), will the Secretary of State tell us a little more about what the Government are doing to identify problems with social housing, which potentially go far wider than the area that immediately surrounds Grenfell?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight that area. There are many lessons to learn from this terrible tragedy, on matters including the quality of social housing and the treatment of residents who have legitimate complaints. That is one reason why I announced the social housing Green Paper, on which we have begun work. In preparation for that Green Paper, I have asked the Housing and Planning Minister to meet as many social housing residents as he can, across the country and in different types of social housing accommodation, so that we listen carefully and learn the lessons.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** I, too, thank the Secretary of State for his update and for making the report of the taskforce available, and I thank the taskforce for its work. I accept that the recovery work is very sensitive, but clearly pace is an issue. Although the emotional recovery of people who are affected by the tragedy takes as long as it takes, there is some urgency about the physical recovery, if I may call it that. Do we not need a timescale for the phased rehousing of all who have lost their homes, so that we do not find ourselves sitting here this time next year and talking about the people who have still not been rehoused? Some urgency about the timetable and a phased process to bring some focus to the rehousing of those affected would be very welcome.

**Sajid Javid:** I assure the hon. Lady that there is a huge deal of focus on rehousing. I do not think that there should be an artificial timescale; the timescale should absolutely be led by the needs of the survivors and the victims, so that they move on in terms of housing when they are ready. We need to make sure that they are all offered choices of permanent housing, and that no one is forced to make a choice at all. If a handful of families are still not ready to meet housing officers and others to talk about their needs, they should not be forced to do so. Rehousing the survivors should be an absolute priority, but the timescale should be set by the survivors themselves and no one should be forced into anything.

**Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for giving such a comprehensive and compassionate statement. He has said that he is not sure how long the taskforce should stay in place. It is clearly doing some very important work. Does he envisage that at some point some responsibilities of the taskforce will transition to other bodies?

**Sajid Javid:** Such a change may well be necessary in the future, but it is certainly not necessary yet. I am very pleased with how the taskforce has operated so far—in looking at issues in detail and coming back with a proper,

thought-through, detailed and independently minded report. That is why I want it to stay in place. No taskforce is in place forever and there may be a need for further changes at some point, but we are not ready for that because I want to make sure that the council follows through on all its recommendations, after which we may take another look at this.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Ministers have been consistently complacent since Grenfell on one of the broader strategic lessons of that disaster, which is the need for more support for and, crucially, more investment in social housing, particularly in London. Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the Government have yet decided to lift the draconian curbs on borrowing by local authorities to invest in more social housing?

**Sajid Javid:** As I mentioned moments ago, I have asked for and started work on a social housing Green Paper looking at many of the issues that I know are important to Members of this House, including the hon. Gentleman. When it comes to resources for social housing, this of course needs to be constantly kept under review. Let us see what the Green Paper says, but the Government have recently announced an additional £2 billion for social housing, which I would have thought he welcomed.

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab) *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** The prize for persistence and good humour goes to Grahame Morris.

**Grahame Morris:** I sincerely thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and the shadow Minister for his response. I also thank the taskforce for its recommendations, which the Secretary of State now wishes to press ahead with and implement as speedily as possible. Will he clarify one particular point? It has been reported that Michael Lockwood is due to leave his position as site recovery manager to join the Independent Office for Police Conduct. Will the Secretary of State indicate the timescale for appointing his successor?

**Sajid Javid:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. It is correct that Michael Lockwood will be leaving his position; he is still in the position at the moment. This information has been shared by Mr Lockwood with the community; he has built up a strong relationship with members of the community, which is very important. I do not believe that he has set a final date for leaving, because one of his roles will be to make sure that a replacement is found and put in place before he moves on.

## Backbench Business

### European Economic Area: UK Membership

5.17 pm

**Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House believes that for the UK to withdraw from the European Economic Area (EEA) it will have to trigger Article 127 of the EEA Agreement; calls on the Government to provide time for a debate and decision on a substantive motion on the UK's continued membership of the EEA; and further calls on the Government to undertake to abide by the outcome of that decision.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting today's debate, and I thank right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House for supporting the application for it. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) and the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) for co-sponsoring the motion.

If the referendum result was indeed a vote to take back control, this House must surely have its say on that critical issue. I rise to commend the motion to the House, because all options both for the transition and for the comprehensive trade and partnership deals must be on the table. I first want to set the debate in context by outlining what the European economic area is and what it is not. I will then explain how EEA membership can square the circle between market access, sovereignty and control. I will also illustrate how EEA membership offers a sensible and workable transition out of the European Union—a bridge, rather than the potentially catastrophic cliff edge of exiting on World Trade Organisation terms.

First, what is the EEA? Simply put, it is an internal market between the EU28 and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein. It was set up in 1993 to allow the participation of non-EU states in the single market. However, the EEA internal market excludes single market features such as fisheries and agriculture, and it does not entail membership of the customs union. That means that EEA members are able to negotiate trade deals with third countries, either bilaterally or through the European Free Trade Association. That is how Iceland became the first European country to strike a bilateral trade deal with China in 2011.

It is through EFTA membership, in conjunction with the EEA, that unfettered trade in goods is achieved. EEA-EFTA membership could therefore provide a solid basis on which to sustain frictionless trade between the UK and the Republic of Ireland post-Brexit.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): The hon. Gentleman just talked about a “catastrophic cliff edge”. Clearly, it is in the interests of our country that we have a free trade deal, but will he put that in context? Exports in 2016 accounted for 28% of our GDP and EU exports for 12.6%. Last month, the World Bank published a study showing that in the event of no deal and WTO rules, British trade with the EU might fall by 2%. That is 2% of 12.6%, or a quarter of 1% of our overall GDP. Therefore, when he talks about a catastrophic cliff edge, let him put it in context.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. May I suggest that he takes a trip to the port of Dover? The Brexit Select Committee, of which I

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have the honour of being a member, visited it recently and we were told that an additional two minutes of processing time on the 10,000 heavy goods vehicles that go through the port would result in a 13 mile tailback. A WTO Brexit, we were told, would add a lot more than two minutes. We therefore have to look at this debate in the context of the institutional capacity of our country to cope with a WTO Brexit, which is critical.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): The west midlands relies a lot on exports to the EU. We have Jaguar Land Rover and a lot of other companies. If we do not get it right on this issue, it will affect them pretty badly.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. On the automotive sector, we know that a WTO-based Brexit would add 10% to the cost of every car we export to the EU. What is more, given the complex, integrated supply chains the automotive industry relies on, there would be tariff and non-tariff barriers on every component that crosses the border. The result would indeed be catastrophic.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con) *rose*—

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab) *rose*—

**Stephen Kinnock:** I will take one more intervention from my right hon. Friend, but I will take an intervention from the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) later.

**Stephen Timms:** Has my hon. Friend seen the recent forecast that a WTO-based Brexit would cost the UK economy 75,000 jobs in the financial services sector alone? Is he not absolutely right to talk about the grave dangers that that would pose to the British economy?

**Stephen Kinnock:** I agree that the financial services sector is critical to this debate, because passporting is required. There would be no passporting arrangements in a WTO deal, so the impact would be catastrophic. We must remember that the financial services sector is not just about the City of London; it supports 1 million jobs across the entire United Kingdom—in Edinburgh, Leeds and so on.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is not simply about lorries queuing? For example, it is also about shell fisheries. There would be lobsters sitting for days in tanks that would be unsellable at the other end.

**Stephen Kinnock:** Indeed, during our trip to Dover, we were informed about the impact in terms of rotting food and vegetables on the border. There are practical, tangible impacts that we must bear in mind when it comes to a no-deal Brexit.

The head of the EFTA court, Carl Baudenbacher, has been a vocal advocate of the UK's joining EFTA permanently or at least as a short-term docking measure—an idea that the president of the European Court of Justice, Koen Lenaerts, similarly advocated over the summer. EEA-EFTA membership is emphatically not the same as membership of the single market or the customs union. The EEA is an internal market that is

conjoined with most of the EU's single market, but it is nevertheless a stand-alone structure with its own legal, regulatory, governance and institutional frameworks.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that according to the president of the EFTA court, to whom he has just referred, that court follows the judgments of the European Court of Justice almost exclusively?

**Stephen Kinnock:** The EFTA court exists as a sovereign body. It of course takes some of its guidance from the European Court of Justice. Nevertheless, were the UK to have judges on the EFTA court body, it would clearly have extra clout and the ability to exercise its sovereign right to interpret the guidelines that come from the ECJ in such a way that suits the membership of EEA and EFTA.

**Robert Neill:** Is not the critical issue that many courts may choose to follow decisions of those with similar jurisdictions? Our courts have historically done that, but with the decisions of common law courts. The EFTA court, however, is institutionally separate from the ECJ and therefore not subject to its direct jurisdiction—is that not the important distinction?

**Stephen Kinnock:** The hon. Gentleman hits the nail on the head. I would add that EU member states are required to refer rulings to the ECJ, whereas EEA-EFTA states are not required to refer rulings to the EFTA court. This is a vital distinction, because it has significant implications for the functioning of the two markets. The EU single market is predicated on the treaty of the European Union, with its commitment to ever closer union. The EEA, however, is governed by the EEA agreement, article 1 of which states that the aim of the EEA is to:

“promote a continuous and balanced strengthening of trade and economic relations between the Contracting Parties”.

The fundamental differences between the founding mission of the EU and the founding mission of the EEA mean that for the EU the four freedoms are indivisible, whereas for the EEA they are negotiable. This, in turn, means that the EEA membership would allow a post-Brexit Britain to square the circle between market access and sovereignty when it comes to that most thorny of issues, the free movement of labour.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I always enjoy listening to the hon. Gentleman's arguments and I have the pleasure of serving on the European Scrutiny Committee with him. Is not one difficulty with his argument that, under this model, we would have to follow all the rules—the rules of the single market and, as he says, the rules of freedom of movement—without having a say or an input into how those rules are made? Is there not a risk that that will not fulfil the wish of the British people?

**Stephen Kinnock:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I am afraid he has misinterpreted how the EEA functions. The EEA joint committee sits with Commission officials, and officials of the European Parliament and the European Council in comitology, which provides the EEA joint committee with the ability to shape EU legislation, regulations and directives. I will come on to this later in my speech, but the idea that the EEA means rule-taker rather than rule-maker is incorrect.

As an EEA member, the UK could unilaterally suspend the free movement of labour by triggering article 112 of the EEA agreement, which allows for an emergency brake on any of the four freedoms on the basis of economic, environmental or societal difficulties. There is legal precedent for this. Upon entering the EEA in 1993, Liechtenstein triggered articles 112 and 113 of the EEA agreement, thus suspending the free movement of labour and ultimately agreeing a protocol that enabled the introduction of a quota-based immigration system.

The manner and form of economic or societal difficulties facing the UK would of course be different, but the fact is that the legal precedent has been set so there is no reason why the UK should not be allowed to follow suit. Having pulled that emergency brake, we would then, as per article 113, enter into deliberations with other contracting parties through the EEA joint committee to negotiate a lasting solution. In the case of Liechtenstein, this took the form of industry-by-industry quotas.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): Is the hon. Gentleman really comparing Liechtenstein, a small mountain state in central Europe, which, frankly, could get full up rather quickly, with the United Kingdom, which is a much larger state and in which there is already a significant problem of migration?

**Stephen Kinnock:** It is patently ridiculous to make that sort of comparison. This is not about comparisons, but legal precedent. I would also argue that the United Kingdom has significantly more political and diplomatic clout than such a state, so the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument does not follow.

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a very strong case—I was basically going to say the same thing—but if we are to draw a comparison with Liechtenstein, surely it is this: if such a tiny country could achieve what it did, we must have a realistic chance of doing the same.

**Stephen Kinnock:** The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head, and I have nothing to add; he is absolutely right.

Liechtenstein is not the only legal precedent. Article 112 safeguard measures were also invoked in 1992 by no fewer than four of the then seven EFTA members—Austria, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein—which all cited the need to protect real estate, capital and labour markets. To recap: the four freedoms operate in an instrumental, as opposed to a fundamental, manner within the EEA, meaning that EEA membership offers a unique opportunity to combine market access, frictionless trade and reformed free movement of labour.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Will my hon. Friend clarify something? Am I not right in saying that, currently under EU law, some restrictions that could be imposed are not imposed—namely, if someone has not worked for three months, they can be excluded from a country? Thousands of people are thrown out of other countries in the EU, but Britain simply chooses not to do so.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I think my hon. Friend's point touches on what sort of reforms to the free movement of labour we think we need. Opinion is divided. In terms of the upstream reform, the argument is in favour

of a quota-based system; downstream reform would be based on registration, but perhaps that is for another debate. My point is that EEA membership enables a lot more flexibility over both an emergency brake and the use of industry-by-industry quotas.

I turn now to the vexed question of ECJ jurisdiction. Here the position is relatively simple, as EEA-EFTA members are not subject to ECJ jurisdiction. The EEA is administered by the EFTA arbitration court and the EEA joint committee, and disputes are managed by the EFTA surveillance authority. These bodies adjudicate only on matters relating to the EEA internal market and any violations of its principles and have far less clout than the ECJ. Moreover, while EU member states' courts must refer legal issues to the ECJ, EEA states are not obliged to refer them to the EFTA court.

The EEA model is sometimes criticised because EEA members are cast as rule-takers as opposed to rule-makers, but that criticism does not stand up to scrutiny. EEA members have the right to participate in the drawing up of EU legislation by the EU Commission, and the EEA joint committee determines which EU laws and directives are deemed relevant for the EEA and whether any adaptation is necessary, so EEA membership would in fact provide the UK with a seat at the table when EU regulations and directives are being shaped.

Clearly EEA membership is one step removed from the heart of decision making in Brussels, but the reality of the referendum result is that our influence in Brussels and across the European capitals has, and will inevitably be, diminished. The only valid question now is how to maximise democratic control and influence while minimising economic damage. I contend that an EEA-EFTA-based transition deal would clearly achieve those ends. The stakes are high.

**Stephen Timms:** I am listening with great interest to my hon. Friend's argument. Will he confirm whether I have understood him correctly? Would the way forward he is advocating require the UK to rejoin EFTA? Is that his proposition?

**Stephen Kinnock:** There are a variety of views on this. Carl Baudenbacher, the head of the EFTA arbitration court, has said that he would favour a docking system and an interim arrangement that puts British judges on the EFTA arbitration court in preparation for finalising a deal—in a sense, a bridging into EFTA. I would advocate joining EFTA as part of moving into the EEA.

**Mr David Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Kinnock:** I will make some progress.

Carolyn Fairbairn of the CBI said only yesterday:

“We remain extremely worried and the clock carries on ticking down”.

As a result, she said, more

“and more firms are triggering their contingency plans to move jobs or change investment plans.”

Reality has finally bitten, even in the minds of some of the most deluded Brexiteers, that it was always a fantasy to think it would be possible to complete the divorce and the final trade deals in parallel. A solid cross-party consensus on the need for a transition deal has therefore emerged, as was made clear in the Prime Minister's

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Florence speech. All parties in the House also agree that we must leave the EU by walking over a bridge rather than by jumping off a cliff, and the EU has welcomed the fact that the Government have finally started to show some signs that they understand the realpolitik of the negotiations.

Given that an off-the-shelf transition deal is inevitable, it is clear to me that EEA-EFTA is the only viable option. The EEA and EFTA are well-established and well-understood arrangements that offer the clarity, stability and predictability that the British economy so desperately needs in these turbulent times. Transferring from the EU to the EEA and EFTA would allow us to balance sovereignty and market access. Crucially, such a transition deal would buy us time for negotiate the final comprehensive trade and strategic partnership deal that will shape the terms of the UK's relationship with the EU for decades to come, while also allowing us to enter into independent trade negotiations with third countries because we would be outside the customs union.

**Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Is my hon. Friend's point not all the more pertinent and timely in the light of the visit of the United States trade representative, Wilbur Ross? He certainly seems to be implying that a US-UK trade deal would take significantly longer than the 19 or 24 months to which the Government are clearly hoping to secure agreement for a transition deal.

**Stephen Kinnock:** I think that there is unanimity, almost, on the issue of the timing. I would add that the benefit of EFTA is that it is not a customs union but a free trade area, thus enabling us to connect with the vital single EU market but also to strike third-country deals with countries including, potentially, the United States.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the United Kingdom became part of EFTA, that could in many respects turbocharge EFTA and make it a far more appealing organisation in respect of trade deals?

**Stephen Kinnock:** That is an excellent point. I think that the current EFTA members recognise the clout that they would potentially have through the addition of a 60-million-person consumer market to their current market, which is a great deal smaller. As we know, global trade negotiations are all about leverage and clout.

**Mr Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Stephen Kinnock:** I will make some progress.

It is clear that the issues we are debating today go to the very heart of what the Brexit process is about. This debate is about the future of the people whom we in the House were elected to represent. It is about their jobs, their livelihoods and their communities, and it is about the definition of our national interest and of our country's place in the world. Yet the Government claim that a separate debate and decision on membership of the EEA are not necessary. Not necessary? How can it possibly be argued that matters of such deep political, economic and constitutional significance should not be the subject of proper deliberation? How can it possibly

be argued that the House should be sidelined and neutered, simply because the Government are terrified of proper scrutiny? Is that really what people voted for when they voted to "take back control"?

While the political case for a separate debate and decision on our membership of the EEA is unanswerable, the legal position is hotly contested. The Government argue that on exiting the EU we will automatically exit the EEA, pointing to article 26 of the EEA agreement, which states that EEA members must be EU or EFTA members as well. However, it can equally be contended that the UK is an independent contracting party to the EEA agreement, being one of the founding sovereign state signatories to that agreement, and that exit from the EEA therefore requires the triggering of article 127. I am not alone in that view, which is shared by eminent academics such as Professor George Yarrow and QCs such as Charles Marquand.

It should also be noted that a conclusive decision in this House that UK membership of the EEA is not wholly contingent upon EU membership would greatly strengthen our negotiating hand, as the EU would be unable to force the UK out of the single market. Some will argue that this question should be settled in court, but a case in February of this year was dismissed as premature, as the Government had yet to state their position on the EEA membership, and it was still possible at that time for the triggering of article 127 to be wrapped up with the triggering of article 50.

On this issue, as with so much where the Government and Brexit are concerned, we now find ourselves in a hiatus—drifting, rudderless, floating around in a mist of ambiguity and indecision. It is therefore more important than ever that this House shows some leadership. It is on the Floor of this place, not in the courtroom, that we should be deciding these matters. It is we who are sovereign.

On 23 June 2016, the British people voted to leave the treaty on European Union; the EEA agreement was not on the ballot paper. There is no referendum mandate for leaving the EEA; and if it had been the intention of this House that leaving the EEA be bundled in with leaving the EU, why did this House not put that in the original statute, either in the European Union Referendum Act 2015 or the article 50 Act?

The people have not spoken, nor have they had the opportunity to speak on EEA membership. It is therefore the job of Parliament to speak, and to debate the matter on their behalf. Moreover, the Miller case established legal and political precedent for parliamentary authorisation of withdrawal from any international treaty that confers rights and obligations that have been transferred into UK law. The EEA agreement clearly confers such treaty rights into domestic law, so if we take the conclusions of the Miller case to their logical conclusion, Parliament must have the right to debate and decide.

I am truly proud of the fact that I campaigned passionately for remain, and I will believe until my dying day that the vote to leave the EU was the greatest act of national collective harm in modern political history. However, I am also a democrat, and fully accept and respect the result of the referendum. The question therefore is not whether we must leave the EU, but how we should leave. That, fundamentally, is what this debate is about.

As elected representatives of the people, and as patriots, our moral duty is twofold: we must act to ensure that the Government negotiate a deal that both protects jobs, livelihoods and the national interest, and that respects and enables greater sovereignty and control. Those who are driven by nationalism, separatism, dogma and ideology are not capable of securing such a deal, for their only goal is to burn every bridge they see and return to a bygone age of splendid isolation, and those who are driven by a desire to rerun the referendum are similarly incapable of moving to the centre ground, which is the only place where pragmatic solutions can be found. For we know that compromise is a sign of strength, not weakness. We know that a country can either have frictionless trade or independence, but it cannot have both. We know that “Rule Britannia” rhetoric provides the sugar rush of an easy soundbite, but it does not put bread on the table.

All of which means that we must have a Brexit deal that puts jobs first. We must have a Brexit deal that keeps our economy as close as possible to the 500 million consumers that are right on our doorstep. And we must have a Brexit deal that holds our deeply divided country together, by delivering to the greatest extent possible on the perfectly legitimate need to reform free movement of labour.

A transition deal that is based on EEA and EFTA membership will deliver a Brexit that protects jobs, livelihoods and the national interest. That is why it is vital that this House is given the opportunity to debate, and decide on, whether article 127 of the EEA agreement should be triggered.

I commend this motion to the House.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. The time allotted for this debate has been somewhat eroded and many Members wish to speak. Therefore, we must have an immediate time limit on speeches of five minutes.

5.44 pm

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who has raised some important and interesting constitutional issues.

The motion before the House today asks us to conclude that

“for the UK to withdraw from the European Economic Area (EEA) it will have to trigger Article 127 of the EEA Agreement”.

It is certainly the case that article 127 provides that every contracting party to the agreement may withdraw from it, provided that it gives at least 12 months’ notice in writing to the other contracting parties. The question is whether that formality actually needs to be adopted. The EEA agreement is an arrangement that has been concluded among the member states of the European Union, the European Union itself and three of the four European Free Trade Association states—namely, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein. There is no doubt, as the hon. Gentleman has said, that the United Kingdom is a contracting party to that agreement in its own right. Indeed, it has no option but to be so, because article 128 of the EEA agreement provides that every European state must, on applying to become a member of the EU,

apply for EEA membership. In other words, Britain’s membership of the EEA is a consequence of its membership of the European Union.

The UK has given notice of its intention to withdraw from the European Union, and by application of the provisions of article 50 that notice will become effective no later than midnight on 30 March 2019, at which point the EU treaties will cease to apply to the United Kingdom. The UK’s departure from the European Union will indeed have an impact on its membership of the EEA. Article 126 of the EEA agreement provides that it shall apply to the territories to which the treaty establishing the European Economic Community, now the European Union, is applied, as well as to the three signatory EFTA member states. Given that the EU treaties will no longer apply to the UK at the moment of its departure, pursuant to article 50, and that the UK is not one of the three EFTA signatories, it necessarily follows that at that moment, on the stroke of midnight on 30 March 2019, it will also cease to be subject to the provisions of the EEA agreement. In other words, for all practical purposes, British membership of the EEA will fall at that point. It will remain a contracting party to the agreement, but under the terms of the EEA agreement, the agreement will cease to apply to it.

There has been a great deal of academic discussion as to whether that is indeed the case, but a view supporting the proposition that Britain will effectively cease to be a member of the EEA on leaving the EU has been given by no less a figure than Professor Baudenbacher, to whom the hon. Gentleman has referred. The professor has said:

“A state can only be an EEA Contracting Party either qua EU membership or qua EFTA membership. That follows from the two pillar structure of the EEA agreement. You are either in the EU pillar or in the EFTA pillar but you cannot be floating around freely.”

The hon. Gentleman has mentioned the desirability of the United Kingdom becoming a member of EFTA. It may or may not be desirable—I personally would oppose it—but it has to be recognised that if we are not a member of either EFTA or of the EU, we cannot be a member of the EEA.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** My right hon. Friend is giving a most learned disquisition. Will he tell us what the practical effects would be if it were legally possible to become a member of the EEA? For instance, would it be possible to control our own borders? It seems to me that the reason so many people voted to leave was that they wanted to control their own borders.

**Mr Jones:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The fact is that we would be left with EU-lite. We would still be subject to the four freedoms, including the freedom of movement of persons. That would mean we would not be able to control our own borders, despite the Liechtenstein precedent.

**Michael Tomlinson:** I am following my right hon. Friend’s argument carefully. Does he agree with my earlier point that, in that situation, we would effectively be rule takers without having the opportunity to make the rules or to contribute in the way that we do at the moment?

**Mr Jones:** My hon. Friend is entirely right on that score, too.

[Mr David Jones]

The hon. Member for Aberavon mentioned EFTA quite frequently in his speech, but the motion does not suggest that the UK should apply to become a member. Indeed, the implication of the motion is that upon the UK ceasing to be a member of the European Union, it could remain a member of the EEA, as Professor Baudenbacher put it, “floating around freely”. That does not provide the certainty that the British electorate requires and certainly not the certainty that British business requires. I am unsure whether the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that Britain should now be applying for membership of EFTA, but if he is, as a matter of law Britain would do so from a position of having ceased to be a member of the EEA. Therefore, upon becoming a member of EFTA, it would have to make its own decision as to whether it should rejoin the EEA. Again, that is not reflected in the motion.

The fact is that what we see today is a last-gasp attempt from those who regret and bitterly resent the departure of Britain from the European Union. It is an attempt to keep us in a halfway house—a kind of European limbo—and as a matter of law and as a matter of politics, this motion should be rejected by the House today.

5.51 pm

**Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): I say to the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) that this is not a last-gasp attempt; this is the start of a fight to develop a form of Brexit that does not crucify our economy. The question of whether and how the UK should leave the European Union has dominated British politics for the past two years. The Government are paralysed by the enormity of the task, and the public are left struggling to make sense of what is going on. One minute, we are staying in the single market and customs union for an interim phase; the next minute, we are not. One day, we are we are planning for no deal; the next, we are not. It is a dog's breakfast. There is no clarity and no strategy. Brexit by adjective is the best we get, with fantasy aspirations of soft Irish borders and frictionless trade. It is meaningless and it is not good enough. I hope that today's debate might start to change that.

The motion is about the European economic area—in effect, the single market. It is about the process by which we might seek to leave it or stay in it, which is different from our membership of the EU. We are currently members of both the EU and the EEA but—and this is a big but—they are distinct from one another. They are governed by different treaties and, while they overlap, different countries are members of each of them. Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein are members of the EEA; they are not members of the EU. There is one process for leaving the EU—as governed by article 50 of the Lisbon treaty—and there is another for leaving the EEA: article 127 of the EEA agreement. The motion before us today does not stipulate whether we should be in the EEA, out of it, in it for a few years or for decades; it simply says that Parliament should decide. Parliament should determine whether we trigger article 127 and notify our withdrawal from the EEA, not the Prime Minister sat behind her desk in No. 10. MPs should decide. This House—the public's elected representatives—should decide. There should be a specific, explicit vote that is binding upon Ministers.

**Ian Murray** (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on all her work to bring this matter not just to the Floor of the House, but to the general public discourse. Does she agree that part of the problem with the EEA and EFTA is the Government's intransigence in looking at the situation? This is an ideologically driven process to take us out of the EEA, out of EFTA and out of the EU and turn us into an island on our own in the Atlantic with no trade deal whatsoever with anyone. [Interruption.]

**Heidi Alexander**: I agree with my hon. Friend. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) says from a sedentary position, this is about dogma. It is not about democracy and it is not about our country's future prosperity.

Last summer, we grafted a massive public plebiscite on to our system of representative parliamentary democracy. I will not repeat my views on how the referendum was conducted—suffice to say I do not think it was our country's finest hour. There was only one question on the ballot paper:

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

Where were the words “European economic area”? Where were the words “single market”? Now some people say, “Well, everyone knew it meant we'd be leaving the single market,” but that is pure assertion. That is an interpretation of the result. Some people may have voted believing that, but others did not. Many more would not have had any idea where to start if you asked them to explain the difference. I do not say that to patronise; it is a matter of fact. If you asked my mum to explain it, she would run a mile. Taking us out of the single market is a political choice. Prioritising controls on immigration over safeguarding jobs and investment is a political choice. Making a massive issue of the European Court of Justice, even though most people would be hard pressed to tell you what it does, is a political choice. Those choices will determine the future of our country for many years to come, and it is the basic responsibility of each and every Member of this House—irrespective of party—to reflect long and hard on whether the form of Brexit being pursued by this Government is the right one.

**Geraint Davies**: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the 2015 Conservative manifesto said both that if they won, the people would have a referendum on Brexit, and that we would stay in the single market? People voting for Brexit therefore assumed that we would stay in the single market.

**Heidi Alexander**: My hon. Friend is completely right. In fact, the precise form of words used in the 2015 Conservative manifesto was that they would protect “British interests in the single market”.

We must get a vote on whether we continue to be a member of the single market. We have to determine whether Ministers notify other countries of our intention to leave the EEA. We cannot cobble something together by claiming that provisions within the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill somehow authorise Ministers to do that, but that is precisely what the Government are trying to do. They are trying to pull a fast one. I am convinced that the repeal of the European Economic Area Act 1993 contained in the EU withdrawal Bill will

be used by Ministers, alongside the powers they want to give themselves in clause 8, to claim parliamentary authorisation for setting the ball rolling on our departure from the EEA. How many of our colleagues understand that?

Why do the Government want to avoid open and transparent debate? Why will we only have two hours at most in Committee to discuss the issue? The answer is obvious. The Government want to avoid an explicit vote on whether the UK should leave the EEA and leave the single market. They are worried that there might be a parliamentary majority for a so-called “soft Brexit”—one where we put jobs first and worry about immigration second. They are right to be worried but they are wrong to circumvent Parliament in this way. That is why I tabled new clause 22, which would give Parliament an explicit vote on our departure from the EEA, and why I support this motion today. As people who are elected to make decisions on the behalf of our country, we have a responsibility to consider thoroughly and transparently the option of staying in the EEA. We have a responsibility to hold on to the car keys to prevent this Government from driving us off the cliff. That is what this motion is about today, and that is why I support it.

5.58 pm

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): For a free trade agreement to be possible after Brexit, the interim period must involve no membership of the EEA, the customs union or EFTA, because that would remove the freedom we need to negotiate with third countries. That includes any period in the EEA, being party to the EEA agreement, like EFTA states, or a bilateral Swiss-style agreement. The EEA essentially means membership of the single market and commitment to the four freedoms—free movement of goods, services, capital and workers. Three EFTA states—Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein—signed the EEA agreement in 1994, but the EEA agreement would mean insufficient freedom for us to be a credible partner in trade negotiations with others. The agreement means taking on the single market acquis, but having no vote on legislation.

Through the EFTA Surveillance Authority, regulation is being harmonised, with EFTA itself stating that “the EFTA Surveillance Authority and the EFTA court... respectively mirror the surveillance functions of the European Commission and the Competences of the Court of Justice of the European Union”.

The EEA therefore does involve the harmonisation of laws in significant areas of the environment, social policy and so on, in those countries’ domestic economies. It involves the application of ECJ case law by the EFTA court, and I completely disagree with the assertion of the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) that it does not. The EEA also includes the free movement of persons. In other words, the European Court of Justice effectively prevails, and our influence over the EEA would be infinitely and hopelessly inadequate.

Let us consider the experience of Norway for a moment. The Norwegian Government commissioned a study of the EEA’s impact, and it found that Norway implements

“approximately three quarters of substantive EU law and policy”. That makes a mockery of much of what the hon. Gentleman said. Furthermore, the cost of the EEA to Norway has increased tenfold since 1992, and nearly

12,000 EU directives and regulations have been implemented through the EEA agreement and have changed Norwegian society in a significant number of areas. We are told that, on the EU legal database, 17,000 regulations have come to us since we entered the European Union, yet Norway, which is in the EEA, has acquired nearly 12,000 EU directives and regulations.

**Gareth Thomas:** Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House when a Norwegian Government last proposed leaving the EEA?

**Sir William Cash:** The Norwegian Government have consistently made it clear that their position is to stay in but, in practice, the trend of attitudes in Norway is increasingly moving against that position. I was at a conference only last week at which a young Norwegian leader of the people’s movement made it clear that more than 70% of young people in Norway want to get out of the EEA and do not want to join the EU. That is the position, and the bottom line—I do not need to speak any longer on this—is that there is absolutely no case whatsoever for our joining the EEA. Joining is completely contradictory to the mandate that we received in the referendum, which is perfectly clear. It is impossible.

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Sir William Cash:** I will certainly give way to—the hon. Lady?

**Anna Soubry:** I am surprised there was a question mark after that bit.

**Sir William Cash:** Right hon., then.

**Anna Soubry:** Don’t worry about the right hon. bit.

I put these words to my hon. Friend:

“the great advantage of the EFTA model is that it is completely independent of the EU yet follows the decisions of the European Court of Justice for the most part, although not always—that is important. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford) noticed that, because not many people have.”—[*Official Report*, 4 July 2017; Vol. 626, c. 1059.]

I just wondered, because those are his very words, as recorded in *Hansard*.

**Sir William Cash:** Indeed, and I entirely accept that that is what the position was at that point in time. The argument has moved on, and the reality is that the mandate from the British people is clear. This House passed the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017 by 499 to 110, or thereabouts, and furthermore the Second Reading of the repeal Bill was passed by a majority, and therefore we will repeal the European Communities Act 1972—that is the will of the House, and that is what I stand on. The reality is that the proposal to put us into the EEA is effectively contrary to the mandate from the British people.

**Anna Soubry:** I gently remind my hon. Friend that he spoke those words in July 2017, long after the referendum. He said them only a few months ago.

**Sir William Cash:** The short answer is that we have a mandate. It has been made absolutely clear, and the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act has been passed by this House. The repeal Bill has yet to

[*Sir William Cash*]

be passed, but the decision on Second Reading has made the House's position absolutely clear to the British people. We are repealing the European Communities Act and withdrawing from the European Union. That is the position, that is the mandate and that is what I stand on.

6.5 pm

**Chuka Umunna** (Streatham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this excellent debate. I preface my remarks by saying that I will use the terms “EEA” and “single market” interchangeably, although I appreciate there are slight differences, because we are basically talking about the single market.

I will first talk about the mandate, which the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) mentioned, then I will comment on the difference between access to and membership of the single market, and then I will talk about social justice.

On the will of the people and the mandate, I remind the hon. Gentleman that, when his Prime Minister went before the electorate in June, she did so on a manifesto that advocated taking us out of the EEA and the customs union and, essentially, pursuing what has been referred to as a “hard Brexit.” She did not get a mandate to withdraw us from the European Union in that way because she lost her majority in this House. The hon. Gentleman talks about mandate, but just look at the general election result. Of course, a lot of people who campaigned on his side of the argument in the 2016 referendum, including the Foreign Secretary, were very clear that our leaving the European Union did not necessitate our leaving the single market. We will hear no more lectures about what the mandate is or is not, because what I know from the election result is that the Prime Minister lost her majority on a manifesto that advocated taking us out of the EEA.

Secondly, there is no doubt that the primary reason for staying in the single market through the EEA is that, frankly, it is the principal way that we can retain the economic benefits of our membership of the European Union while being outside. Some suggest that we could do that through a free trade agreement, like the agreement the EU has negotiated with Canada, but that would take years to negotiate and, of course, it would essentially cover goods, whereas 80% of the British economy is made up of—

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Services.

**Chuka Umunna:** As my hon. Friend says, 80% of the British economy is made up of services. That is why staying in the EEA offers such benefits, and we do not just want access; we want to be a member of this thing because access is inferior to membership.

Above all, in my remaining time I make it clear to our movement as a whole that the single market, through the EEA, is about much more than a market; it is an engine for promoting social justice. For people who believe in social democracy, promoting social justice is the primary reason for wanting to support the motion of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon. The EEA helps to make us part of a framework of rules that essentially protects the British people from unfettered

capitalism and the excesses of globalisation, which in many respects were what drove the Brexit vote in the first place. We benefit from the rights we get at work, the protections we get as consumers and the protection offered to our natural environment through being part of the single market.

There are three principal reasons why people on my side of the political spectrum argue against the EEA. First, they say that it would act as an impediment to having a social democratic manifesto that advocates public ownership. Well, look at Spain, the Netherlands and Austria, which have publicly owned rail, energy and water, et cetera. They say that we would not be able to stop zero-hours contracts, for example, but Luxembourg and Belgium, which are part of the single market, already have. Of course, Germany has regional banks and a national investment bank, which we would advocate in a social democratic manifesto. The EEA is no impediment to that.

Secondly, they say that being in the EEA would act as an impediment to achieving our goals because we could not control immigration, or control it better than we currently do. My hon. Friend has already outlined how we could do that, and the TUC has done the same.

Finally, they say that we cannot stay in the EEA because it offends national sovereignty. I would argue that one of the biggest threats to national sovereignty is the power of multinational companies that operate across borders. Frankly, the best way of countering that power is to operate across borders with others.

I just ask people to look at the actions of EU institutions in the past couple of years. They should look at the €13 billion that Apple has been ordered to pay the Irish Government because it wishes to avoid tax, at the fine Google has sustained and at what Amazon has just been forced to repay, and then ask themselves: are those the actions of some capitalist club? No, they are not, which is why so many Conservative Members have advocated leaving and why we should advocate at least staying in the EEA.

6.10 pm

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this important and much needed debate. It is important because it is very relevant to our relationship with the EU. We see a lot of discussion going on in the media about the remain and leave debate, and the vote we had. In my view, that is over: the referendum decided that we should leave the EU, and that should now be a given—we have just to get on and accept it.

However, the referendum did not decide our future relationship between the UK and the EU. That is for the Government and Parliament to determine. It is our responsibility to achieve the best possible arrangement for the UK in our relationships with the EU. When we are doing that, we must recognise the views of both the 52% and the 48% from the referendum. It is important that we get the arrangement right and that it balances the different views in the best possible way, acknowledging that that will be difficult and we will have to compromise—that is a very important word.

I accept that there are two clear and different views: the “WTO view” and the “hardly any change at all” view. All of us would agree that in a perfect world there would be a perfect free trade agreement, but we need to

have a reality check. At the moment there is a huge amount of uncertainty, which affects Parliament, Government activity, individuals and, most importantly, industry and commerce, where it is leading to decisions about investment not being taken or being postponed. To some extent, damage is already happening and it will continue to happen. For example, in my constituency a tyre factory was going to go ahead prior to the vote, but this has now been postponed and may never happen, so we are seeing the loss of £155 million of investment.

Two key decisions have been made. The first is that we are leaving the EU in March 2019. Secondly, there is a general acceptance that there has to be a transitional arrangement until 2021. I have watched the debate so far, and my conclusions are simple. We are leaving, as that was the decision of the people in the referendum. We all accept that there is a need for a transition, and we must also recognise the huge amount of uncertainty and the need to minimise it as soon as possible. We should look for the most practical, sensible and easy option to deal with that uncertainty—one that is easy to understand and well established. We do not need to invent the wheel once more. That solution is simply that we base our future on rejoining EFTA, thereby retaining membership of the EEA.

The advantages of such an approach have already been set out: we would leave the EU, as set out in the referendum; we would be out of the ECJ; agricultural and fisheries policies would be returned to us; we would have our own trade agreement opportunities; and, most importantly, we are talking about something that is established and understood by all concerned, and is a compromise.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** When my hon. Friend's constituents voted to leave the EU, did they really vote to ensure that our borders remained open for ever more through European immigration? That would be the consequence of his proposal that we stay in the EEA.

**John Stevenson:** I am going on to talk about that very issue. I fully accept that my constituency voted to leave, and I totally respect that. I also understand that many of the reasons revolved around immigration.

By rejoining EFTA, we would eliminate a huge amount of the uncertainty almost immediately and we could very well turbo-charge EFTA in the future; a country of 65 million people would be coming in to support and help improve the prospects of additional agreements with other countries. But we have to acknowledge that there are certain compromises involved in our rejoining EFTA: free movement would continue—although, as the hon. Member for Aberavon has pointed out, there is article 112. We must also remember that we will need some sort of free movement if we are to make sure that we have people coming into this country with the right skills to support our industries.

**Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is clear that if David Cameron had been able to secure a form of emergency brake, it is more likely than not that the UK would have voted to remain? If EFTA does allow for third-party trade deals plus the introduction of an emergency brake, while ousting the jurisdiction of the ECJ, it should merit the closest consideration.

**John Stevenson:** Hindsight is always a wonderful thing, but I very much sympathise with the point my hon. Friend puts forward.

Continued EFTA membership does mean access to the single market. Some people have commented that we would be a rule-taker. While we are going through the transition, that is likely to be true, but one can make the argument that we are already a rule-taker, because under the EU a lot of the decisions are made via a majority and we are sometimes in a minority and still have to accept those decisions. There would also undoubtedly be a requirement for us to continue to make a payment into the EU.

I accept that at present this approach is not perfect, but it is a compromise that we could have now. It would still allow us time to go for further negotiations to modify things such as immigration, access to the single market and the rules that we have to accept, and to have a debate about the amount of money we contribute to the EU. Today, politics would appear to have drifted to the political wings. The voice of the centre is struggling to be heard. It is as though the centre is no longer seen as appealing or as a place to be. However, I remind this House that life is not black and white; it is shades of grey. Compromise is required and certainty is urgently needed.

By rejoining EFTA, we would, to some extent, end the uncertainty now; business would be able to plan for the future more confidently. Negotiations would be able to continue with all parties, understanding the transition and the nature of the institutions, and in the long run we would hope to achieve a bespoke UK-EU agreement through the auspices of EFTA. I may be a centrist willing to be pragmatic and to compromise, but I firmly believe that such an approach is in the best interests of the people I represent and of the future of the United Kingdom.

6.17 pm

**Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson), who made a number of interesting points, two of which I wish to follow up. He rightly noted that the outcome of the referendum did not determine the future basis of the UK's relationship with the EU and that it was this House's responsibility to do that in the months ahead of March 2019, when we leave the EU. He also rightly noted the huge amount of uncertainty at the moment, which is stalling many investment decisions and, understandably, worrying the business community up and down the UK. That has been underlined in graphic detail over the course of the CBI conference today and recently—notably by the Governor of the Bank of England just last week, when he highlighted the significant impact that Brexit is having on our economic growth in the UK, at a time when, in his view, the British economy should be doing much better than it is.

I have to be straight with the House: I come to this debate having made it clear in the general election that I wanted Britain to maintain full access to the single market and having always thought that Britain was stronger through co-operating with our allies through the European Union and, in particular, its single market element. I have to accept that even though my constituency voted strongly in favour of remain, that relationship looks like it is going to change in the future, but it seems to me that continued membership of the EEA represents

[Gareth Thomas]

an opportunity—certainly in a transition phase, but potentially in the longer term as well—for the concerns of those who voted to leave and those of us who voted to remain to be squared.

It is striking that, notwithstanding all the concerns we heard from the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), Norway has consistently sought to stay in the European economic area, with the benefits of not only full access to the single market but control of agriculture and fisheries. Surely that is the beauty of the EEA at this time, as we look at the case for a longer-term transition deal than the Government are currently considering. It is part of an internal market with the single market. It replicates it, albeit with the two exceptions that I have outlined and that other Members have acknowledged, yet it comes without membership of a common defence, security and foreign policy, which concerned a number of those who voted to leave. Crucially, it allows member states to negotiate their own trade deals.

As a former trade Minister who watched and took part in many a long discussion about trade deals, I struggle with the idea that we could do quickly a comprehensive trade deal with, say, the United States, or even with India or Australia. Given the short timescale for a transition deal that appears to be envisaged by Ministers, and certainly by the EU, it is fanciful to think we will be able to sort out comprehensive trade agreements within that time. The EEA therefore surely represents a sensible transition arrangement. It is also worth considering for the longer term.

In the seconds I have remaining, I turn to the issue of whether or not we voted to leave the European economic area. I say gently to the hon. Member for Stone that I do not think we did. Notwithstanding the points that others have already made about a mandate, there was no reference to our leaving the EEA in the pamphlet that the Government published to explain the context of the referendum vote. I therefore think there should be a specific vote in the House on whether we should leave the EEA.

6.22 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a great pleasure to speak in this extremely timely debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who put his case very well.

I wish to focus on the free movement of people, because it is the issue that hangs over this debate. Currently, this country will not consider the EEA because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) said, those who voted to leave fear that uncontrolled migration from the EU would continue. In my view, we underestimate the amount of control we could exert and the sorts of levers we could have in relation to tiny little Liechtenstein.

We must ask ourselves four questions about the immigration that will follow our leaving the EU. First, would we still allow unskilled migration into this country? This is critical. It is completely unrealistic to imagine that Britain could go from being almost totally dependent on unskilled migration to suddenly having none at all. The Government accept that. Care homes and many parts of industry would struggle severely and there would have to be a significant transition.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** The whole point of this exercise is that we want to have a system by which we let into this country people who will contribute to this country, so of course we are not going to go from full-scale migration from the EU to no migration. That is an absurd reduction of our argument.

**James Cartlidge:** I put that point as a question because the official leave campaign line was that it would end unskilled migration to this country. That is not realistic.

My second question is controversial, but it is incredibly important. It is currently illegal for an unskilled migrant to enter this country from outside the EU. We legally discriminate because we are members of the EU. We allow unskilled migration only from within the EU; we do not allow access through tier 3 visas, which would allow unskilled migration from outside the EU. The latest figures from Migration Watch show that net migration from outside the EU was 50,000 more than from inside it.

If we go for this so-called global Brexit and open up unskilled migration through an equalised immigration system, we will simply have, at best, a reduction in EU migration and a significant rise in non-EU migration. If the country voted on immigration terms, it did not vote for that. That is why I say we should not underestimate the level of control the country would have over migration through being in some form of the EEA or EFTA.

**Heidi Alexander:** The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the fact that the UK currently controls immigration from countries that account for 90% of the world's population did not feature at all in the referendum campaign has led to a lot of misunderstanding about how this country's immigration system works?

**James Cartlidge:** The hon. Lady is entirely right. We currently restrict unskilled migration to a population of 750 million; if we no longer discriminate and have an equalised system, we will open ourselves up to a population of 7.5 billion. Of course, yes, we will bring in controls, visas and so on, but how on earth will the man from the ministry be able to work out, when he gives his quota to various sectors, how many he allows from Europe and how many from outside? One need only look at the proposals for the seasonal agricultural workers scheme: all the pressure is not for workers to come from the UK; they are asking for a scheme that allows workers to come from Russia and Ukraine. Yes, we should look into how we encourage British workers and what we do with the education system, but the point is that the necessary change cannot happen overnight.

My third question is: do we want a system in which we are ourselves subject to visa controls when we go to France, Germany or Italy? That would be a massive disadvantage, and it leads me to my fourth question. I do not think that the country would expect visas to be applied to people from wealthier western European countries. The perception would be that the issue is with immigration from those countries with a significantly different economy from ours, from which the volume has therefore been greatest. It must be said that those countries, particularly Poland, are seeing levels of growth return to previous levels. These things are fluid.

If we look at those four questions, we can conclude that a variation on free movement would not be unpalatable to the British people, because they would not want visas

to be applied to themselves and probably would not want to open up to unskilled migration from outside the EU. When we factor all that in, the sort of situation they have in Liechtenstein—a tiny atom of a country compared with ours—would recommend itself.

Like Opposition Members, my hon. Friends the Members for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and for Carlisle (John Stevenson) made the point that EFTA offers many potentially attractive elements. I, of course, support the Government in trying to seek the ideal, which is a comprehensive trade agreement that covers services, bespoke to us and negotiated in good time. We all want that. I argue strongly for a transition deal, because we know that it will be asking a lot to get to that agreement particularly quickly. Should we at least consider EFTA for the transition period? Contrary to what I believe my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) said, I understand that EFRA members can negotiate their own third-party trade deals, alongside their being signatories to those already in place for the collective EFTA countries. As my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle said, we would boost that group, giving it a much greater global presence. We would not be in the common agricultural policy or the fisheries policy. We would have far more freedom, but we cannot have total freedom—it does not work like that. We would have the security of being members of the group and we would give businesses the security of knowing the structure they would go into.

We must not underestimate the issue of immigration. It may be difficult for some to comprehend, but there will be many voters out there who, if they wake up and see that on leaving the EU we simply have a seesaw of an immigration system, from EU at one end to non-EU at the other, will feel betrayed. They are expecting immigration to fall in totality. The truth is that if we want to control immigration in the long run, we need not just the legal powers but the workforce. We need to have the people in this country, and I am afraid that that will mean further welfare reforms and consideration of how the apprenticeship scheme works—all kinds of things. But it cannot happen quickly, so we need to look at the transition. In my opinion, it would be sensible to at least look at a transition within EFTA.

6.29 pm

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). He has made an excellent speech, and I want to hear more from him in the future.

I begin by taking on the claim that was made by some on the Government Benches that, somehow, a decision was taken in June 2016 to leave the European economic area. If that is the case, I have to ask why, in their submission in December 2016, the Government's lawyers said:

“No decision has been taken either to serve or not to serve a notice under article 127 of the agreement. Consequently, there is no decision which is amenable to judicial review.”

No decision was taken because that decision has to be taken by the Government; it was not automatic. Therefore, this Parliament must have the final say about that matter.

I am not an advocate in any strong way of the proposal of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock). I am an unreconstructed remainer.

I remain so, and I will fight to stay in the European Union. We have not left yet, but if—if—we leave, I will fight to get the best possible deal for our country.

There are problems with EFTA and the EEA: the arrangements do not cover agriculture or fisheries. Potentially, that is a massive problem for Northern Ireland, and it needs to be taken into consideration. As we have heard, the arrangements do not cover the financial sector and they do not deal with many problematic issues that we will have to confront if we leave the customs union. We need to have an EEA-plus arrangement rather than just an EEA one, as that will need other agreements alongside it. It may take time to negotiate those, and in the meantime, let us not go on a Gadarene rush over the cliff.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I am amused by the hon. Gentleman's proposal to have an EEA-plus. Presumably, he can now tell us what will be the difference between being a member of the EU and being a member of the EEA-plus?

**Mike Gapes:** EEA-plus would relate to issues such as having an agreement on a common foreign and security policy, and an agreement on those matters that do not affect some of the EFTA or EEA countries because the UK is not Liechtenstein, Norway, or Iceland. We must have the closest possible relationships with our EU neighbours and partners on many issues to do with policing, security and defence. Having said that, the essence, which is the economic relationship, is fundamental, and a transition is better than a disaster. The disastrous crashing out of the single market with no deal, or a very costly bad deal, is not in our interests. As Michel Barnier, the EU's negotiator, has said:

“We don't have time to invent a new model.”

Why reinvent something when it is already there and when it can be taken up and built on to establish the security and the certainty that our businesses need in this transition period?

Interestingly, there is support for that view in an article by Wolfgang Münchau in the *Financial Times* today. He said:

“Once the reality of a limited trade deal sinks in, we are left with only two logical strategies: either join the EEA, or go for a minimalist agreement and focus on making that work.”

That seems to be the choice, and there are some on the Government Benches who, for ideological reasons, want a minimalist agreement. That is because they are not Brexiteers, but wrexiteers and they are prepared to bring down our economy and slash our public sector and our national health service. It will cost our public services billions if our economic growth is reduced and our economy is reduced. We will then suffer the consequences. We will also suffer the consequences of unpicked fruit and difficulties in the agricultural sector. All the major financial services companies, banks and American banks are already planning to move their headquarters from London to Dublin and their personnel from London to Frankfurt and Paris. Those things are happening even now before the decision is finally taken. Let us stop this insanity, act now and, at least, stay in the EEA.

6.35 pm

**Anna Soubry** (Broxtowe) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this debate. I was pleased to

[Anna Soubry]

support him, when, along with the hon. Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander), we went to the Backbench Business Committee to seek this debate. We are grateful that, finally, we have a debate on one of the most important matters that faces this Parliament, and indeed faced the previous Parliament.

I am in an interesting position in that, when I stood again in Broxtowe on 8 June, I made it very clear on every piece of literature and in the emails that I sent out to my constituents that I would continue to make the case and support the single market and the customs union and stand up and advance the positive benefits of immigration. Therefore, unlike many others, I actually have a mandate—some would say a duty—to make sure that I put forward, in the strongest possible terms, the undoubted benefits of the single market. I very much support this motion.

May I quote—these are not my words—from a speech? The task of hon. and right hon. Members is to guess the date.

“The task of government is two-fold: —to negotiate in Brussels so as to get the possible results for Britain; —and then to make you the business community aware of the opportunities, so that you can make the most of them. It’s your job, the job of business, to gear yourselves up to take the opportunities which a single market of nearly 320 million people will offer...what a prospect that is.”

Can Members guess the year? It is 1988. What about the place? It is Lancaster House. From whom did those wise words come? It was none other than the right hon. former Member and Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. She was one of the strongest proponents of the single market. Why? Because she knew of the huge and wondrous benefits that it would bring to the economy and therefore to the people of this country. I am old enough to remember when this country was rightly described as “the sick man of Europe”, and we were. When we joined the European Union, embraced the single market and led it by the fine words and actions of Margaret Thatcher, we then rose to become the fifth largest economy in the world. Our membership of the single market and the customs union and our understanding of the positive benefits of immigration have made our country the great economy that it almost is today.

**Sir William Cash:** Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that, as time progressed, the right hon. Lady to whom she has referred also said that she thought that we had made a mistake in joining the single market and repudiated it, because she felt that she had been misled?

**Anna Soubry:** I must accept my hon. Friend’s words, as I am not aware of that quote. If he were to ask me what Margaret Thatcher would have said about the bureaucracy of the European Union and the fact that we should not join the euro, I am sure that we would all be in agreement, but goodness me, by making our decision in June 2016, have we not thrown away the baby with the bathwater?

I agree with all those who have spoken before me, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), who made a powerful speech about the benefits of the single market and the realities of Brexit. He also made many important points about immigration.

We do control immigration in this country. We control it with this thing called the market, because people only come here to work. Now, there is a very easy way for us to control immigration; we can trash the economy and then people will not come here because there will be no jobs. The idea that there is a small army of people who are out of work, sitting at home and begging to be working in the fields of—dare I say?—Lincolnshire or in one of the great food-processing factories in my constituency is a complete and total myth.

We have the highest rate of employment since the ’70s; there is almost full employment in huge parts of the country. Where do we find the highest employment rates? They are in the areas with the highest rates of migrant workers. And where do we find the lowest levels of immigration? In the areas with the highest rates of unemployment. Let us nail that one because, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk rightly said, that was another con played on the British people. They will see that all the EU regulations about which my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) complains are about to be taken into British law, that they will not get their £350 million for the NHS and that immigration will not go down.

People are fed up with Brexit. I think they want us to get on with it. Well, there is a model. It is sitting on the shelf and it will do the job: it is the EEA and it might also be EFTA. It will solve the problem and stop the negotiations so that we can get on, get out, get a deal and give certainty to British businesses. Then this Government can get on with the domestic agenda, as we need them to do.

6.41 pm

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a great pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). She mentioned Margaret Thatcher, who I recall quoting Attlee saying that referendums were the instruments of “dictators and demagogues” because Hitler used them to assume supreme power, militarise, invade and commit atrocities. Of course, the EU referendum—an advisory referendum—was full of misinformation, and every day people are saying, “This isn’t what I voted for.”

We are here to talk about market economics. If the UK leaves the single market—the most developed free market in the world—the EEA and the EU, which has 66 bilateral trade agreements, it will be the greatest withdrawal from free trade in UK history. The reality is that we are not turning towards free trade; we are turning away from free trade and proper trade for the good of our economy.

Hon. Members have talked about the need to restrict migration, but they should know that the EU has enormous powers in its rules to restrict migration. For instance, people are thrown out of other EU countries when they have stayed for three months without getting a job, and there is no automatic right to benefits. What is more, EU migrants contribute to the economy 35% more in tax than they consume in public services. Migration is good. If we can salvage some of the benefits by staying in the EEA, all well and good; it is second best to staying in the EU.

People say that we can turn away and have our own trade relations with, for instance, the United States, but as we have already seen in the case of Bombardier, the United States will not think twice about imposing tariffs.

We have heard Donald Trump saying that foreign countries are taking his jobs, making his products and stealing his companies, so we know that we would be hammered. By being in the EEA, we could trade with the US through the single market. We will not get the same terms as the EU has with the US. The firms which have their headquarters here will move into the European zone to trade, because there is no prospect of having any sort of deal with the US in the next five or six years.

We have seen the benefits of migration. If we turn our backs on the EU and the EEA, as people are suggesting, higher-value individuals—people in finance, lawyers, and doctors from our NHS—will continue to move out. All the studies show that the retention will be among the so-called lower-value people. If we swapped the people from Britain who migrate to retire in Spain for Polish workers, for instance, we would be swapping people who take money out of the NHS for those who make a contribution. It makes no economic sense.

My view is that this place should ultimately have a vote on the exit package, and that that vote should be at least three months before exit day. Before that, the people should be given a vote—a final say—on the exit package. The simple reality is that we continue to hurtle towards this cliff edge, and people say, “Tell you what, we’ll give you some rubber shoes to jump over the end”, but an economic and social nightmare is emerging. A few fundamentalists think we should carry on, but the people should have the final say because they are simply not getting what they thought they would get. The ideas about migration were completely misconceived: we may have to turn our back on the EU and open up our trading borders to India, but India is demanding more visas; China does not want us to penetrate that market; and the US will demand much higher terms. We are heading for a major economic downturn.

Being part of the EEA is the last opportunity to save ourselves from some of these problems. If we ultimately decide to leave the warm house and our friends, and to live in the garden, it is better to live in the shed than in the open air. I will leave it there.

6.46 pm

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Well, I am not sure that it is ever very wise to live in a shed, but we will leave that to one side.

The hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) gave a characteristically intelligent speech, raising some important questions. Speaking personally, my main motivation for supporting the leave campaign was parliamentary democracy: I wanted to reassert the control of Parliament over our affairs. I have always been influenced by the debate, starting in 1992 with many great speeches from both sides of the House, which questioned our entry into an entirely new treaty set-up, whereby our own laws were no longer sovereign.

The hon. Gentleman is right to raise his question and I would also like to question the Minister. It is my belief and hope that we are committed to having full parliamentary approval of this process. As I understand it, the Government are attempting to make a deal, which will then be put to the House of Commons before we actually leave the EU at the end of March 2019. The House of Commons can then presumably approve or reject that deal. But we are now in the article 50 process, which is irreversible. Therefore, as I understand it, if the

deal was rejected, it would not happen and we would exit without a deal. I put that point to the Minister; I am sure that he can resolve these matters easily.

Now, of course, it would be possible for Members of Parliament—particularly the Opposition, if they could garner a majority—to engineer a vote on whether we stay in the EEA. Of course, for that to happen, we would want to have some idea of the policy of Her Majesty’s Opposition, but that is currently somewhat unclear. We do know that they are committed to leaving the EU, but they have been quite careful—I quite understand, as they are in opposition and their job is to cause as much trouble as possible for the Government—and remarkably unclear about their official position with regard to accepting staying in the single market. The reason for this is that the six most leave-voting constituencies were Labour constituencies and the six most remain-voting constituencies were Labour constituencies. To be fair to the Labour party, it has to face both ways and that is what it is doing.

**Mike Gapes:** The hon. Gentleman initially said that he voted the way he did because he wanted parliamentary control. Why, then, is he so reluctant to allow this House to make a decision about whether we should leave the EU or leave the EEA?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Actually, I said precisely the opposite, if the hon. Gentleman had been listening. I have made it absolutely clear that I am a committed parliamentarian, and I am absolutely committed to a vote.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): Is it not true that this House is here to debate, and is it not proper that, as we debate, we come to new conclusions and new ways of looking at things? It is perfectly legitimate for people to start thinking about different outcomes from the ones they were thinking about at the beginning, because more things are coming to light.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** That is a very fair point, and I entirely accept it.

**Heidi Alexander rose—**

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I have very little time now, so may I just finish my remarks? [*Interruption.*] I have plenty of time? Well, I have to give way to the hon. Lady.

**Heidi Alexander:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Given what he said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) about supporting a vote on whether we leave the European economic area, would he be willing to sign my new clause 22 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, which would put that into statute?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that kind offer, but my problem is that, in these terms, I am a Government loyalist, and I want to help the Government to get this Bill through. That is most important, because if we do not get the Bill through, we will be in a kind of limbo—I apologise for using the expression “a kind of limbo”. All that the Bill does is transfer all the EU laws into our law. I am anxious that we get a generous free trade deal. I am also anxious that we pass all the EU laws into our law, particularly because I do not want us to create a bargain-basement economy—I want us to preserve workers’ rights and to

[Sir Edward Leigh]

be a gold-class economy. All that the Bill does is transfer all those protections for workers, and many other useful things, into our law, so I will be supporting the Government—

**Sir William Cash** *rose*—

**Sir Edward Leigh:** And so, I hope, will my hon. Friend.

**Sir William Cash:** May I refer my hon. Friend to the remark he made about the Labour party looking at this issue both ways? The Labour party did, in fact, vote against the principle of the Bill, which includes the repeal of the European Communities Act 1972, by virtue of which all the legislation and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice come into effect.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Of course I note that point, but I must now proceed to the end of my remarks.

I have said what I want to say about parliamentary procedure, and I now want to say a bit—

**Anna Soubry** *rose*—

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Well, I have to be polite to my right hon. Friend.

**Anna Soubry:** I am extremely grateful. May I be clear about the wise words from my hon. Friend? Setting aside the withdrawal Bill—he makes a good point about the Bill, and I think we all agree on it—if there were some other mechanism by which it was guaranteed that this place had a say on our membership of the EEA, is he saying we should have a vote? We could take it away from the withdrawal Bill and put it somewhere else, but is he saying that this place should make that decision?

**Sir Edward Leigh:** In fairness, I think it will be virtually impossible to avoid such a vote. If the Opposition—once their position becomes clear, and it is not—want to have a vote, I am not sure it would be possible for the Government to avoid such a vote. However, I go back to my very first remarks: as I understand it, we will be voting on the deal, and if the Government are defeated, we will go back to article 50 and exit without a deal.

In the very last minute I have, may I say a bit about the EEA, because people have to be entirely honest about it, and particularly about the Norwegian experience? The whole point of Norway's membership of the EEA was that it was supposed to be a waiting room for the EU; it was actually to prepare Norway for EU membership. That is why Norway has adopted the overwhelming majority of EU laws in the intervening years.

I understand why some people here who voted remain in the referendum want to stay in the EEA, but I urge them to be honest about it—let us have an honest debate. Once we stay in the EEA, we basically sign up to the four freedoms, to losing parliamentary control over many of our own laws and to unrestricted immigration from the EU. People may think that that is a good idea, but they have to at least be honest about it. If both sides of this debate are honest with each other, we will perhaps get a fair conclusion.

6.54 pm

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) has been courteous and thoughtful, but I just remind him that he won his seat in 2015 on the basis of a commitment to keep the benefits of the single market for the UK.

I warmly welcome this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on the motion he has proposed. A German Foreign Office official told me earlier this year, “If you want the benefits of the single market, you have to obey the rules of the single market.” Ever since the referendum, Ministers have been telling us that we will have the benefits of the single market but that we will no longer have to obey the rules. Unfortunately, that will not be the outcome of these negotiations. If, by some extraordinary fluke, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union was able to persuade Michel Barnier to agree to such an outcome, it would immediately be voted down by other European Parliaments—certainly by the Bundestag—and by the European Parliament as well.

I think that that recognition is starting to dawn on Ministers. At the start of this process, they told us we would get barrier-free access to the single market, but I notice they do not use that phrase any longer; they now say we will have access with a minimum of friction—whatever that turns out to be. We are not, sadly, going to get the barrier-free access they said at the start that we would get, but we need barrier-free access. If we are to leave the European Union, we need to find a way, in conformity with the rules, to maintain the economic benefits—the very large economic benefits—for the UK of our membership of the single market, so my hon. Friend is on to something extremely important.

Membership of the European economic area comprises an EU pillar and an EFTA pillar. With the UK exiting the European Union, membership of EFTA is, as we have heard from the hon. Members for Carlisle (John Stevenson) and for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) and from my hon. Friend, certainly something we should consider, and it may well prove to be the right way forward. However, there are some disadvantages to EFTA membership, and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) touched on them. In particular, because EFTA countries are not in the customs union, the grave problem at the land border with the Republic of Ireland would not be resolved by joining EFTA. The Government are telling us two things about that: first, that we will not be in the customs union; and secondly, that there will be no infrastructure at that border. Sadly, those two assertions are contradictory; they will not both be true, and one of them will have to not be true. We have a serious problem at that border, and joining EFTA would not deal with it.

I was interested by a proposal made in a paper presented recently to the Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise by Sebastian Remøy, who used to be an official in the EEA co-ordination unit in the EFTA Secretariat, suggesting that, alongside the EU pillar and the EFTA pillar in the EEA, there should be a third pillar—a UK pillar—which would allow greater flexibility and overcome the disadvantage of EFTA membership. It might also deal with some of the difficulties that Norway might raise about the UK joining EFTA and unbalancing the current structure and modestly sized secretariat. I just put that idea on the record—I do not

know whether it is the right one, but it needs to be looked at, alongside membership of EFTA, as a way forward.

In the referendum, leave campaigners dismissed serious concerns about the economic consequences by describing them as “Project Fear”, but as we have heard in the debate, those fears are starting to be realised. The letter from business organisations said they needed certainty about the transition by the end of this calendar year, but they are not going to get that.

**Wera Hobhouse:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it is time we dropped the term “Project Fear” and replaced it with the term “Project Reality”?

**Stephen Timms:** We certainly need some hard-headed economic realism as we face the decisions ahead—the hon. Lady is absolutely right.

We are not going to get certainty by the end of the year. The Secretary of State said to the Select Committee that we would have details of the transition by the end of March 2018 and that he hoped that for the sake of three months businesses would hold off implementing their back-up plans until then. But for much of the financial services sector, an announcement of plans by politicians in the absence of legal certainty is completely useless. They have to—the regulator requires them to—put in place their back-up plans if there is no legal certainty about the transition by the end of March next year. We are going to start to lose significant numbers of jobs. I mentioned the figure of 75,000 that is an estimate of the number of jobs that the financial services sector will lose from a hard Brexit. It looks as though—I have seen an estimate—15,000 of those will go if we do not have legal certainty about the transition by the end of March next year. That will impose a grievous economic blow upon us. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon is making an extremely important case that the House needs to heed.

7 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I support this motion and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing it, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) and the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry).

Membership of the EEA is, in effect, membership of the single market. It means tariff-free and quota-free trade, the absence of non-tariff barriers, and mutual recognition. I agree with Members on both sides of this House who support the motion and who not only support the need for a proper debate and vote but are calling for the UK to remain in the EEA. We should listen both to those with positions of influence and experience in the UK and those from outside the UK as to why we should remain in the EEA.

In a blog, a Member of this House described very clearly to his constituents the benefits of remaining in the EEA. For effect, I have removed the geographical references. I thought that what he said was excellent:

“The EU gives businesses like the Brewery...access to the world’s largest market...It gives young people across our Country the opportunity to move freely throughout the continent. And if you are an entrepreneur...the EU Single Market allows you to trade freely without having to set up offices and legal structures in each country.

The EU Single Market is important because it means job opportunities for our children and grandchildren. Of course we would survive outside the EU”

and the single market

“but the question is would we do as well as we would within it? Would”

the large company that bought a local company have gone ahead with the purchase

“and secured the...1,300 jobs have been as interested to make this purchase had it not given the firm access to 28 members of the single market? This is not a theoretical issue:”

the local company

“is much stronger, and jobs in that company much more secure than they were now”

that the buyer

“has made that commitment. It is vital for the”

regional

“Economy to have access to the EU markets, which in turn attract foreign investors, create jobs and prosperity in”

the region

“and drive inward investment.

Those advocating that we should leave the EU say we will continue to be able to trade with other European countries and more widely across the world. Yes we will, but on what terms and how long will it take to agree them? This instability is a high price to pay and one which even the most ardent Leave campaigners have admitted would continue for years.

Across”

the region

“over 360,000 jobs are linked to the EU. Our manufacturing is reliant upon freedom to export to the EU: a staggering 49% of”

the region’s

“manufactured exports go directly to Europe.”

Will the hon. Member who penned that excellent description of the impact of leaving the single market continue to advocate remaining in the single market in his new job—as the Government’s Chief Whip?

My hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) clearly described how membership is about more than just economic benefits; it is also about social justice and protection from the excesses of multinational corporations. Beyond the UK, our neighbours are warning us of the terrible impact that leaving the EEA will have on our country. Ireland’s Agriculture Minister is quoted in today’s *Evening Standard* as saying:

“If the *raison d’être* for Brexit in the UK was about striding the globe and doing their own trade agreements, a hard Brexit is walking away from a market of 450 million people in Europe. And that is bad for Ireland—it is worse for the United Kingdom.”

Carolyn Fairbairn, the director general of the CBI, is quoted in the same article as saying:

“We’re now in the window of decision making.”

Business leaders in my constituency and across the UK are very concerned about a hard Brexit. Every business leader I meet locally—those from large to small businesses in all sectors—ask me to do what I can to stop a hard Brexit. That is why the decision needs to be made in this House, after proper debate, and soon. That is absolutely essential if we want to abide by our commitment to parliamentary democracy. For the sake of the thousands of my constituents who work in the aviation sector, the thousands who work in financial services, and the thousands working in many other sectors who will be impacted by a hard Brexit, and for

[Ruth Cadbury]

the sake of the hundreds of businesses whose short-term and long-term future is dependent on the UK remaining in the EEA, it is only right that Parliament has time to debate and vote on a substantive motion on the UK's continued membership of the European economic area.

7.5 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak in these debates. First, I put it on record that I am a Brexiteer and very proud to be a Brexiteer. People in my constituency also voted to leave, and the matter is very clear in my mind. I may be the lone voice on the Opposition Benches in relation to this issue, but I am not a lone voice in the whole of the Chamber. I think very highly of my colleagues and friends on these Benches, and they know that, but we have a difference of opinion on this. I should make that clear right away before I say any more.

The people of Strangford spoke very clearly and their voice said that they wanted to leave. Democracy has spoken and the decision is made: we should support the Government and get on with the job. I say respectfully and very gently to those who are remainers that the matter is over, the decision is made, and people have moved on. In June 2016, they spoke. We in this House have to listen to that mandate, and we cannot ignore that.

**Geraint Davies:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the famous quote by Keynes, who said:

“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?”  
The facts have changed. This is not what people voted for.

**Jim Shannon:** Well, the people in my constituency certainly tell me that they did vote for this, and I had the impression that it is what I was voting for as well. Other Members will have a different opinion, and they have expressed that today.

Numerous businesses in my constituency have a great European market, including Willowbrook Foods, Lakeland Dairies and Mash Direct. They are major agri-food employers in my area. I seek to do all I can to help them and will continue to do so. I sought an assurance from the Prime Minister and from a former DEFRA Minister that those jobs in the agri-food sector would be okay, and they gave me that assurance.

**Paul Girvan** (South Antrim) (DUP): In relation to those businesses, the message that I am getting—I wonder if it is coming across to others—is that the “Project Fear” agenda that is being put forward by those who are still not wedded to the idea that we leave the EU, or the idea of not getting whatever sort of deal they want, is sending out the wrong message to industry and creating fear within industry. There is inconsistency in terms of sending out a positive message.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank my hon. Friend and colleague for his comments. We hear that today from Members who have a different opinion in relation to remain and inject fear into the whole debate. I am very positive about leaving the EU and leaving the EEA. When we are out and away, we are going to be better off. Let us have a positive outlook and we will be successful.

Do I believe that the best economic benefits are to be found as a non-EU member of the EEA? The bottom line is that EEA membership involves a range of obligations, including free movement of people, financial contributions to the EU, and accepting EU rules with no direct say over them. In short, we get the immigration issues, the tariffs and the charges, but very few benefits. Some Members have referred to the comprehensive trade deal, which I believe we can negotiate—I hope so. I have great confidence in the ministerial team and in what we are trying to achieve.

**Wera Hobhouse:** May I ask the hon. Gentleman what will happen to his opinions and his positive outlook if we cannot get the positive trade deals that he is hoping for?

**Jim Shannon:** I am a “glass half full” person. I look on the bright side of life, because that is what we should do. Some people have a “glass half empty” outlook, and they look at everything negatively, but I do not look at things in that way. I am positive about what we are doing, the way forward and the ability of our ministerial team to achieve what we want. We have to agree to differ about how some things will come together, and that is part of life.

**Anna Soubry:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who is my friend, for giving way. Is he not extremely worried—even though he is a great optimist, as we have heard—about the real possibility of not getting a deal, especially in relation to customs? Northern Ireland needs a proper deal on customs, and there is every chance that we will not get it. That eventuality would be a really serious problem for Northern Ireland.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the right hon. Lady—she is also my friend—for her intervention. I think we share the same wish to get a successful deal, although, with great respect, I do not share her fears about it. I am keen to get a deal.

In the short time I have left, I want to share some figures that I have been provided with, which call into question the matter of EEA membership on financial grounds alone. About 43% of UK exports in goods and services went to other EU countries—£240 billion out of £550 billion total exports. That share has generally been declining, since exports to other countries have increased at a faster rate. The EU's share of the world economy has declined, too. In particular, the developing world has grown faster than the developed world. We have to be mindful of the opportunities in other parts of the world and expect to do better out of them. About 54% of our imports into the UK came from other countries in the EU in 2016. The world will continue to need our goods, and we will continue to need to buy goods from the rest of the world. It seems to me that to remain a member of the EEA would not be in our nation's best financial interests.

**James Cartledge:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Jim Shannon:** I am sorry, but I cannot. I am nearly at the end of my speech and I have given way a few times.

In order to get something out of the EEA, we have had to put a lot more in, and we are finished with being the poor relation in the European family. We are going to be strong and positive, and we are going to do good.

Let us make that our mindset. I am thankful to the ministerial team, who are attempting to work with people who do not want to work with us—who would prefer to huff in a corner than to achieve a relationship that benefits all involved. Such attitudes from Europe have brought our people to decide to leave, and every statement that is made after our negotiations with the EU further underlines and reaffirms the people's decision to leave Europe.

We recently had some issues to do with Bombardier, but Airbus has stepped in and we have extra contracts for the C series plane. I believe that we have many things to look forward to. We need to let the EU know that we have learned a lot from our membership of it. We have learned that we must put our economy first and take care of our own, because no one in the EU appears to be doing that. My opinion is that continued membership of the EEA is not beneficial, and that our withdrawal from Europe encompasses withdrawal from the EEA. That must take place, and I look to Ministers to deliver it.

7.13 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing the debate. He knows that I do not agree with absolutely everything that he said in his speech, but he has provided Parliament with a valuable service, and we should be grateful to him and to the other Members who secured the debate. I believe that we should stay in the customs union and the single market, although I know that the hon. Gentleman and I do not entirely agree on that. None of us has all the answers in this debate, least of all the Government. In fact, it would be nice if the Government had the odd answer, but they do not. It is almost inevitable, in a Parliament of minorities, that we will have to compromise, and so today's debate has been useful.

The hon. Member for Aberavon made particularly good points about the ambiguity and indecision at the heart of Government. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, quite rightly, that he voted to leave, and we respect his decision to do so. But a consistent thread throughout the debate has been the fact that we do not know what leaving the European Union will mean. Not only was yesterday Guy Fawkes day—someone else who was perhaps a little bit disappointed in this place—but it marked 500 days since the EU referendum. In those 500 days, we have received very few answers indeed.

The Minister has had longer than 500 days to think about what leaving the European Union means, because he, like many of his colleagues, was a member of Vote Leave and campaigned to leave. Some Conservative Members have spent decades planning to leave the European Union. One would have thought that having spent not just 500 days, but decades planning to leave the European Union, they might have the odd answer about what doing so would mean. Alas, no. As our contribution to the debate, the Scottish National party have put forward a compromise—drawing, on a cross-party basis, on expertise from those who know the European Union best—which is that we should remain part of the single market and the customs union.

In Scotland, we know the importance of the single market. The Fraser of Allander Institute, which was not scared to publish its report about the impact of leaving the European Union, estimates that leaving the single market

could cost Scotland alone 80,000 jobs and £30 billion, never mind the impact on our friends and partners elsewhere in the United Kingdom. In view of that known impact, it is little wonder that the Government are terrified about releasing their impact assessments.

**Sir Edward Leigh** *rose*—

**Stephen Gethins:** On that point, I will gladly give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Is the hon. Gentleman such an enthusiast for remaining in the European single market that he is totally committed to remaining in the United Kingdom single market?

**Stephen Gethins:** This is the astonishing thing. All of a sudden, Members have invented this idea of remaining part of the United Kingdom single market. The European Union is a club for independent sovereign states in a way that the UK is not. The thing that the hon. Gentleman has missed, throughout our membership of the EU, is that the UK remains sovereign and independent in a way that Scotland is not. Trying to compare the UK single market with the European single market is pretty desperate stuff, and Members do not have to believe in independence to recognise that.

I want to highlight the importance of freedom of movement, which is another area on which I may disagree with the hon. Member for Aberavon. Freedom of movement is something from which I have personally benefited as a UK citizen, and I want young people to have the same opportunities as I had. Freedom of movement makes our country a richer place to live, and all parts of the United Kingdom benefit from it. It enriches us financially and, critically, as a society, making this country a more diverse and tolerant place to live. Seasonal workers are especially important to our industries, and freedom of movement particularly benefits us at certain times of year. It is also important to our universities and other industries.

I would like to put on record the fact that I am astonished by what I am hearing about the European Court of Justice. The European Union has been a success for many reasons, one of which is that the European Court of Justice sits at its heart and arbitrates on behalf of 28 member states. Something else that has been missed is the fact that we will need an arbiter in whatever comes about after we leave.

We also face the danger of no deal—something that has been openly touted, quite irresponsibly, by Conservative Members. We noted from the press that there was a Halloween presentation to the UK Cabinet on no deal. That is a spooky thing for us all, given its impact. As I did on 1 November, when Parliament voted to see the impact assessments—we are still not going to get them—I wonder what the Government are trying to hide from us. What was the Cabinet told? What do they know? The House deserves to know, and that is why the House voted to know what is in those impact assessments.

A no deal scenario will hit hard the big cities in Scotland and, I am sure, elsewhere in the UK, with Aberdeen being particularly badly hit.

**Brendan O'Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Five hundred days ago, my constituents voted overwhelmingly to remain in the European Union. They did so because

[Brendan O'Hara]

they understand the benefits to our agriculture and tourism sectors, which are buoyed in large part by EU nationals. We have heard a lot about the EEA this afternoon, but does my hon. Friend agree that continued membership of the European Union for Scotland is absolutely essential?

**Stephen Gethins:** As usual, my hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is why people from every single local authority area in Scotland—every single one—voted to remain part of the European Union. Voters in Scotland were able to see through the arguments, or rather the lack of arguments and lack of detail, from Vote Leave, which was grossly irresponsible, just as they are able to see through the Tories in election after election.

We must preserve the single market. However, it has to be said that anything is better than the mess in which we find ourselves at the moment—and it is a mess. The Minister, who I hope will address this, has a great deal of responsibility. He has committed his political life to taking us out of the European Union, so why is he afraid of publishing the impact assessments? Why did he campaign on a blank piece of paper when he was part of Vote Leave, an act of gross irresponsibility that he has carried over into government? He should reflect on that, and I hope we will at long last have answers, because 500 days is a long time to wait.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) made an excellent point. Government Members like to talk about mandates, but he talked about the general election as when a hard Tory Brexit was utterly rejected. The mandate of the people says that this is a Parliament of minorities, which means that we must all pull together. There must be compromise, and we need to see some movement from the Government.

7.21 pm

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to wind up this debate, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and his co-sponsors, my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) and the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), for securing it. Each of them made forceful and thought-provoking contributions, and I thank the many other Members who have made excellent speeches.

The Opposition have consistently called for the maximum parliamentary transparency and accountability compatible with conducting the Brexit negotiations, and for Parliament to have more of a grip on the process. That is why we welcome the fact that this debate is taking place, and support the efforts of hon. Members from both sides of the House who have sought to secure greater clarity and certainty about what steps, if any, would be required for the UK to withdraw from the European economic area as a matter of international law. As always in these Brexit debates, we have covered a wide range of issues, but the motion refers specifically to continued membership of the EEA and to whether article 127 of the EEA agreement needs to be formally triggered. It is on that that I want to focus my remarks.

As several hon. Members have said, the EEA is an arrangement that enables three non-EU countries—Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway—to participate in the EU

internal market and allows the 28 EU member states to benefit, as Britain undoubtedly has, from preferential access to their markets as part of that agreement. Formally, the contracting parties to the EEA agreement are the 31 individual countries, although the EU itself was also added as a contracting party in 2004, because the EEA has a mixed agreement. As such, like other EU member states, the UK is a signatory to the agreement.

Article 127 of that agreement, which is the focus of the motion, sets out a basic rule for withdrawing from it. The article requires a contracting party wishing to leave the EEA to provide 12 months' notification of withdrawal to the other contracting parties to give them time to modify the agreement. Taken at face value, article 127 suggests that the UK will have to give formal notification of withdrawal from the agreement to the other 30 contracting parties if it intends to leave the EEA. As several Members have suggested, the implication is that unless such formal notification is given, the UK will remain a contracting party to the agreement and a participant in the EEA after it has exited the EU.

It is worth briefly considering the implications of that argument, because there are reasons to believe it would not be the quick fix that many assume it to be. At a minimum, if the UK were able to remain a participant in the EEA after it had exited the EU, simply by means of failing to provide formal notification under article 127, it is likely that formal modification of the EEA agreement would still be required. As I sure the House is aware, it would involve an onerous, time-consuming and uncertain process of treaty change and ratification. That is because some parts of the EEA agreement refer to the contracting parties, which could be any of the EEA states, but other parts refer specifically to EU and/or EFTA states.

The situation could not therefore apply to the UK after Brexit unless it joined EFTA, which, as several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and my right hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms) have said, would not resolve crucial issues such as the customs union or the Northern Ireland border, and it would not be a straightforward process. I note the comments of the Norwegian Prime Minister in August that joining EFTA, even for a temporary period, would, in her words, be a "challenging and costly" undertaking.

To illustrate the problem that would be created if we attempted to remain part of the EEA simply by letting this lapse, rather than by providing formal notification, it is worth examining article 36 of the agreement. The article makes it clear that the beneficiaries of the right to the freedom to provide services are EU nationals and EFTA state nationals. Hypothetically, if the UK attempted to remain in the EEA as a third type of contracting party, it would therefore be subject to the rules of the EEA agreement, but its citizens and businesses would not benefit, which I do not think anyone in the House would countenance. The EFTA option is therefore the only viable one in the majority legal opinion, but as several hon. Members have said, that is not as straightforward as some would like to suggest.

However, taking a step back, it is not even clear whether the requirements of article 127 apply to a contracting party that has decided to end its membership of one of the two bodies—the EU and EFTA—that enable a state to be party to the agreement in the first place. It is not clear because it has never been tested. It is true that

there is no provision in the EEA agreement requiring a contracting party to leave the EEA if it ceases to be a member of the EU or EFTA, but the wording and spirit of the agreement clearly appears to rest on the assumption that only EU or EFTA states can be party to it.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** This is all very interesting as a legal lecture, but is the Labour party in favour of staying in the EEA?

**Matthew Pennycook:** The Labour party's position is very clear: we want to seek a deal that retains the benefits of the single market and the customs union. We think we should be a member of the single market for the transitional period. Whether the EEA option is the only viable one for doing so during the transition is a question for another day. The wording of the motion on article 127 and continued membership of the EEA is very specific.

In short, the situation is entirely unclear. In the opinion of the House of Commons Library, the majority legal view is that under the present wording of the EEA agreement, it is impossible to be a party to that agreement without being a member of the EU or EFTA. That view has been put forward by a number of experts, including, most prominently, Professor Baudenbacher, the President of the EFTA court. He has argued that there is no scope within the EEA agreement for a third type of a contracting party that is neither an EU nor an EFTA member. The argument has not yet been tested in court.

**Mr David Jones:** Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether the Labour party agrees with Professor Baudenbacher?

**Matthew Pennycook:** As I have said, this legal opinion has not been tested. Interpretations differ, but I would say that the majority legal view supports Professor Baudenbacher's assertion that there is currently no way to become a third type of contracting party to the agreement.

The argument has not been tested in court, as I have said. As the House will know, in February 2017 the High Court was asked whether the Government required the explicit consent of Parliament to enable them to leave the EEA, but the application was rejected on the grounds that it was premature since the Government had not then made a final decision on their EEA withdrawal mechanism. As things stand, in the absence of greater clarity, the door is clearly open for future legal challenges against the Government on this issue.

Greater clarity is required, and I have no doubt that the Government are aware of that. I assume their position on this matter is under review. That position has certainly evolved over time. In a response in December 2016 to a written question submitted by my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham East (Mr Leslie), the Government were clearly interpreting subsection 1 of article 126 of the agreement to mean that the UK is a member of the EEA only in its capacity as an EU member state. As such, we will automatically exit and secede from the agreement when we leave the EU.

However, the Government since appear to have shifted away from that position. According to reports of court proceedings taken from a judicial review application to the divisional court in February, the Government accepted that article 126 did not

“give rise to termination of the EEA Agreement ipso jure [in law]”.

More recently, in responding to a question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon on 7 September, the Secretary of State argued that although article 127 does not need to be triggered for the agreement to cease to have effect,

“we are looking at it just to make sure, for clarity purposes, that we meet its requirements.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 285.]

Is the Minister able to tell the House today what progress has been made in that regard? The Government's latest position appears to be that even if our EU exit does not automatically terminate the EEA agreement in law, any continued signature to the agreement would not equate to functional single market membership.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East said in her powerful speech, whatever one's opinion about whether the UK should be in the EEA, out of it, in it for a few years or in it for decades, it is crucial that we have greater clarity on this matter. I hope that in his summing up, the Minister will shed more light on the Government's position before we come to the Committee stage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

7.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this debate on the European economic area and matters related to it. It has been an exceptionally vibrant debate, which is reflected in my time running extremely short as I rise to sum up.

The EEA agreement entered into force on 1 January 1994 between the European Community, as it was, and members of the European Free Trade Association. The agreement has the effect of extending the internal market of the EU to three European Free Trade Association members: Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. The fourth current EFTA state, Switzerland, rejected EEA membership in a referendum in 1992.

The territorial extent of the EEA has changed over time, with all new countries joining the EU obliged to become signatories to the EEA agreement. A number of countries have joined the EU from EFTA, including Denmark and the UK in 1973, Portugal in 1986, and Austria, Finland and Sweden in 1995. Neither EFTA nor the EEA were designed to facilitate exit from the European Union. Indeed, EFTA and the EEA have been conveyors to EU membership, interrupted by referendums in the two largest remaining EFTA states. I mentioned Switzerland's rejection of the EEA in 1992; Norway rejected EU membership in 1994.

As we look to the future, we value our relationships with EEA and EFTA states, and we will continue to do so after we leave the European Union. We have made it clear that our offer to the EU on citizens' rights also applies to the EFTA countries. We are talking with the three EEA-EFTA countries and Switzerland to ensure that there is continuity, recognising the need to promote stability for businesses and individuals from and within those countries.

The motion that we have debated today claims that “for the UK to withdraw from the European Economic Area...it will have to trigger Article 127 of the EEA Agreement”.

As I said in a written answer on 12 September, when we leave the EU, the EEA agreement will no longer operate in respect of the UK. The UK is only a party to the

[Mr Steve Baker]

EEA agreement by virtue of our EU membership, so the Government's legal position is clear: article 127 does not need to be triggered for the agreement to cease to have effect when we leave the EU.

We have explained our policy repeatedly. The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), said in answer to a written question on 17 October that "the European Economic Area Agreement will no longer operate in respect of the UK"

when we leave the EU. Prior to that, the Secretary of State said in response to the hon. Member for Aberavon on 7 September:

"The United Kingdom is a party to the EEA agreement in its capacity as an EU member state, so on exit day the EEA agreement will cease to operate in respect of the UK."—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 285.]

Finally, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister confirmed to the House as early as March that our participation in the EEA is linked to our EU membership.

It is not only the Government who have made that clear. The man who led the European Council's legal service for 22 years, Jean-Claude Piris, wrote in an article in September that the UK

"will automatically cease to be an EEA member when leaving the EU."

He added:

"Neither the EU, nor its current 28 member States, are members of EFTA. After Brexit, the UK, not being a member of EFTA, and not anymore an EU member, could not be an EEA member".

The president of the EFTA court, Dr Carl Baudenbacher, who has been quoted a number of times today, has also explained that the UK will lose EEA membership automatically when we leave the EU:

"A State can only be an EEA Contracting Party either qua EU membership or qua EFTA membership."

On the fundamental premise of today's motion, there is a clear consensus that the EEA agreement will cease to operate automatically in respect of the UK when we leave the EU.

The second part of the motion calls on the Government "to provide time for a debate and decision on a substantive motion on the UK's continued membership of the EEA".

I welcome the opportunity we have had today to debate the EEA. A further debate is unnecessary. In addition to today's debate, as has been mentioned, amendments have been tabled to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. It remains to be seen whether the House will turn to those in Committee.

As the Government have made clear, when we leave the EU, we will leave the EU's internal market. We will not seek to become signatories to the EEA agreement. Acceding to the EEA would guarantee a bad outcome for the UK. As hon. Members know, the EEA agreement covers the four freedoms: the free movement of goods, services, persons and capital. We have listened to EU leaders, and we understand and respect their position that the four freedoms of the single market are indivisible and that there can be no cherry-picking. The democratic decision of the people of the UK means that we cannot accept all the obligations of the EU internal market, so things will be different when we leave.

European economic area membership would mean the UK having to adopt at home, automatically and in their entirety, new EU single market rules in order to maintain market access—rules over which we will have little influence and no vote. Such an absence of democratic control would not be viable for the people and businesses of the UK. I share the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that EEA membership would inevitably lead to friction and a damaging reopening of the nature of our relationship in the near future. That would be exceptionally undesirable.

Whether the EEA is right for the EEA-EFTA states is a matter for them; I say only that it would not be right for the UK, which is quite different from the EFTA states. Norway's population is 5.26 million and Switzerland's is 8.42 million. There are more than 8.5 million people in Greater London alone. Iceland's population of 338,000 is comparable to that of the great city of Coventry. Liechtenstein's population of something over 37,000 is about half the number of electors in the Wycombe constituency.

Those of us who care about the future prosperity of the UK cannot allow our country to be shoehorned into a position of permanent rule-taking, with the inherent considerable risks of major harm to our economy. Our task is to find a new way to work together in partnership with the countries of Europe, recognising that our rights and obligations in relation to the EU have changed. However deep our love for the EEA states, it cannot be said that they are comparable to the UK either in population size or economic structure. I have no hesitation in saying that that the EEA would not be right for us, even if it may be right for them.

The Government will seek a unique and ambitious economic partnership with the EU, based on our rules and regulations being the same at the start and on maintaining our commitment to free trade and high standards, while allowing for us both to make changes where we want to. When we leave the EU, we will no longer be part of the EEA.

7.38 pm

**Stephen Kinnock:** This has been an excellent debate and I thank Members from all parts of the House for their contributions, although the Minister's winding-up speech was deeply disappointing.

We live in a deeply divided country: city versus town, young versus old, graduate versus non-graduate. The referendum did not create those divides, but it certainly gave them voice. An EEA-based Brexit is one that could reunite our divided country: it is a Brexit that provides the basis for avoiding a hard Irish border; it is a Brexit that offers the opportunity for reform of free movement of labour; it is a Brexit that maximises access to the single market; it is a Brexit that removes us from ECJ jurisdiction; it is a Brexit that enables us to strike independent trade deals with third countries; and it is a Brexit that provides the certainty and predictability that our country so desperately needs in these turbulent times.

The clock is ticking and the stakes could not be higher. There is no mandate for leaving the European economic area. It was not on the ballot paper in June 2016 and the result of the 8 June election this year was the final nail in the coffin, surely, for a hard Brexit. A debate

and decision on a substantive motion on EEA membership are therefore urgent and desperately needed. I commend the motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House believes that for the UK to withdraw from the European Economic Area (EEA) it will have to trigger Article 127 of the EEA Agreement; calls on the Government to provide time for a debate and decision on a substantive motion on the UK's continued membership of the EEA; and further calls on the Government to undertake to abide by the outcome of that decision.

**Sir William Cash** (Stone) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. My right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), I think somewhat inadvertently, made a reference to my interest in EFTA and the model of jurisdiction. What I actually said on 4 July 2017 was by reference to the jurisdiction of the European Court and the EFTA court, exploring whether we could find a viable and proper way to achieve jurisdiction in relation to the issues under consideration. I think my right hon. Friend and I agree that I was perhaps slightly misinterpreted, but I do not want to press the point any more than that. I just want to get it on the record that I was not referring to EFTA as such, but merely to the jurisdictional opportunities it might offer.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I am very, very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order, and for giving me and the right hon. Member for Broxtowe notice of it. It is not strictly a matter for the Chair, but, as the hon. Gentleman said, he has placed the matter on the record. I think we will leave it there. Everybody is happy, so that is terrific.

## Transport in the North

7.41 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered transport in the North.

It is very nice to see a fellow Yorkshire MP in the Chair for this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time to debate this important issue. I thank the many hon. Members who sponsored the application, in particular my co-sponsors, the hon. Members for Shipley (Philip Davies) and for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy).

Over the past four months, the Transport Secretary has made a number of significant announcements on transport in northern England. On 20 July, he released a written ministerial statement cancelling a range of rail electrification projects, including Oxenholme to Windermere, and the whole line north of Kettering to Sheffield and Nottingham. The privately financed plans to electrify the Hull to Selby line had already been scrapped in November 2016, despite Transport for the North describing the scheme as:

“intrinsic to the story of transformation and provide necessary conditions to support the radical step-change required to deliver the Northern Powerhouse and strategic transport improvements to underpin this.”

The Department for Transport claims that bimodal diesel electric trains will realise

“the same significant improvements to journeys”

as electrification. On 21 July, the Transport Secretary, speaking to the press, cast doubt on the electrification of the trans-Pennine route and again talked about bimodal trains. Finally, on 22 August, he wrote in *The Yorkshire Post* boasting that there was to be a record £13 billion of investment in northern transport over the next Parliament, but that to secure further gains it was up to northern leaders, backed by Transport for the North, to realise the gains themselves.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, along with other hon. Members. She describes recent Government announcements. Do they not make our constituents ever more conscious of the significant disparity between investment in transport in the North, and in London and the south-east? Does she agree that if we really are to have the kind of transport infrastructure we require for our future economic development, we need both the money and the powers to take decisions for ourselves?

**Diana Johnson:** As ever, my right hon. Friend puts his finger right on it: we need the money and the powers.

Alongside many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I sought this debate to have the opportunity to hold the Secretary of State to account for the announcements he made over the summer. It is good to see a Transport Minister on the Treasury Bench, but I am disappointed that, on this very important issue for the country, the Secretary of State is not here to listen to and respond to the debate when it is his actions over the summer and in previous months that have prompted the debate.

I want to make the case for a much bolder and more ambitious transport strategy for northern England. Despite what has been claimed, Britain is becoming more, not less,

[Diana Johnson]

regionally divided. The inequality between our regions' economies is the largest of any country in Europe. The productivity gap between north and south is also widening.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Does the hon. Lady accept that the regional disparity in funding, in particular on transport, has been the same for decades and that this is not a party political issue? We should be working together, cross-party, to make sure that future investment is more fairly distributed throughout the UK.

**Diana Johnson:** I do not want this issue to be party political; I want it to be cross-party. This is in the interests of Britain, so we in Parliament should work together.

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Diana Johnson:** I will, but one last time. I am conscious that there is not much time.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way and I pay tribute to her for securing the debate. Does she agree that for far too long, improving equality between the north and the south in terms of transport infrastructure has meant improving links between the north and the south, rather than the links within regions, which is what will really boost our regional economy?

**Diana Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes that point very well and I absolutely agree with it.

I want to pursue the issue of regional inequalities. One core goal of public spending should be to tackle the deep-rooted inequalities between our regions, but all too often our transport and infrastructure spending has reflected those inequalities, or, even worse, compounded them. The gap in transport investment between the north and the capital is stark and widening. Nowhere is this divide more apparent than in Yorkshire and the Humber. We are to get just £190 a head in future transport investment over the next few years, the lowest of any UK region. London will get £1,943 a head—10 times as much. Transport for the North, with new statutory powers, is to get £60 million to develop transport plans for the whole of the north of England. That sounds impressive until we note that as long ago as 2008 Transport for London was spending £50 million just on advertising.

I welcome the £13 billion available for northern transport over the next five years, which I am sure the Minister will talk about, but I want to put that in the context of the London Crossrail projects. Crossrail 1, a single project in London, cost more, at £14.8 billion, than the north will get in this entire Parliament. The new Crossrail station at Tottenham Court Road cost £1 billion. Crossrail 2, with an initial budget of £31.2 billion, could yet dwarf it even further. Crossrail 2 was given backing from the Secretary of State this summer, at the same time as he was cancelling investment in the north. In backing Crossrail 2, I do not recall the Transport Secretary saying that London had to have bimodal trains—it is getting electric trains.

The practical consequences of this divide are clear for all to see. It takes longer to travel from Liverpool to Hull than it does from London to Paris, and that is without the frequent delays. As IPPR North has highlighted, if the north had received the same transport investment as London over the past decade, we would have received an additional £59 billion. We cannot afford to ignore three regions with a population almost twice that of London and an economy larger than the three devolved nations put together.

There are immense economic gains to be realised if we plug the gap in transport investment. As the Northern Powerhouse Independent Economic Review highlighted, a proper investment plan for the north, including major transport investment, would create an additional 850,000 jobs and add £97 billion to the economy by 2050. I admit that priorities need to be reordered, but it does not have to be an either/or choice between London and the south-east, and the rest. The underlying problem is that Britain spends well below the international OECD average on infrastructure. All political parties must acknowledge that this is a national concern that requires urgent attention.

The previous Chancellor recognised the potential of the northern powerhouse—indeed he coined the phrase—and set out some ambitious promises for the region. In the short to medium term, we were promised dramatic improvements in our existing railways and stations. In the longer term, he expressed support for the £25 billion to £30 billion Crossrail for the north project, promising to halve journey times between Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield to 30 minutes. We were told that our strategic road network would get unprecedented levels of new investment, spearheaded through a new organisation, Highways England, including promised investment in 43 road improvements across northern England, among them the A63 at Castle Street, in Hull, on which work was scheduled to begin by 2018. Finally, he promised new powers, devolved to northern England, to help realise all these gains. Transport for the North, created in 2015, was eventually to become a statutory subnational transport body and assume similar powers to those of Transport for London. It was to work alongside stronger local councils, a network of local enterprise partnerships and powerful elected Mayors.

Sadly, the reality has not lived up to these promises, so I ask the Transport Minister to make the following five commitments. First, the Government should spell out exactly how they expect bimodal, diesel-electric trains to realise the same benefits as electrified ones. A short written ministerial statement will not cut it. All the evidence suggests that they are the inferior option. They will be the first bimodal trains built in Britain since the 1960s. In Britain, diesel cars are being phased out at a time when diesel trains seem to be being phased back in. All those European countries that still have non-electric lines are all pursuing electrification. There is strong evidence that in diesel mode bimodal intercity express trains will be slower than the ones they replace. Great Western Railway has admitted as much in the case of the intercity trains on its line. No rail system that is not electrified can be described as “high speed”, which is ironic given that previous Whitehall statements have referred to the north as getting “High Speed 3”.

Network Rail promised electrification, saying that it would deliver shorter journey times, 20% to 30% lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 33% lower maintenance costs, but all these gains might now never be realised. Journey times from Manchester to Liverpool look set to be 30 minutes longer than promised and journeys from Leeds to Newcastle 20 minutes longer. Where does this leave plans for future rail investment, especially Crossrail for the north? Northern leaders and Transport for the North had always been clear that short to medium-term rail improvements ran hand in hand with longer-term plans. In developing Crossrail for the north, Transport for the North is still working from the baseline assumption that these rail upgrades will deliver the journey time improvements promised.

If the Transport Secretary is so confident in his approach, he should publish an independent expert assessment of exactly what kinds of travel times, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, upfront costs and maintenance costs we can expect from the bimodal trains that he is so keen on. This assessment should state whether they will meet Transport for the North's baseline assumptions and assess their impact on realising longer-term investments, such as Crossrail for the north. All those years he was boasting about electrification, he must have known that bimodal technology existed. Instead, bimodal technology is one of the excuses, alongside the discovery of Victorian rail tunnels in the north, for dropping investment plans.

Secondly, the Minister must urgently address the uncertainty caused by the Transport Secretary's recent announcements and recommit to the investment that the previous Chancellor promised. He must commit to electrification of the trans-Pennine line, the midlands main line, the Hull to Selby line and those parts of the north-west triangle still due for completion, and in order to realise key economic benefits for our region, he must give Crossrail for the north priority over Crossrail 2 for London.

Thirdly, the Government should provide Transport for the North with the powers it was promised, along the same lines as those in London. We now know that, in the statutory instrument to be laid shortly in Parliament, Transport for the North will not have nearly the same powers as Transport for London. In the north, we need to be able to finance infrastructure projects and drive forward private investment, but rather than embracing these opportunities, the Government have given us the worst of all worlds: neither the money to fund our transport projects and lever in private investment, nor the power to raise funds and promote the north ourselves.

Fourthly, we need the road investment promised. In March 2017, the National Audit Office strongly criticised Highways England and cast doubt on whether existing commitments would be met. It has already pushed back the start dates of 16 road investment schemes and paused six others. The A63 improvement in Hull has since been delayed to at least 2020. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy) has had to fight hard just to get a pedestrian footbridge built over the A63—for safety reasons—before the main work starts in 2020.

I must mention bus services. Northern bus services have been hit hard: between 2010-11 and 2016-17, bus budgets were cut by 22% in the north-east, by 23% in the north-west and by 37% in Yorkshire and the Humber; and seven in 10 councils have cut bus services since 2010.

The Government must reaffirm the commitments they had made, commit to funding the road network properly and to delivering those and future improvements to a proper timescale.

Finally, and most fundamentally, we need a long-term, cross-party commitment to addressing Britain's regional inequalities and plugging the gap in investment between London and the rest. This needs to be a long-term commitment from both sides of the House. Future Budgets could, and should, be judged by how they reduce these inequalities.

In conclusion, the north's problems are Britain's problems. If we are to stand any chance of solving the deep-rooted challenges our country faces—solving our productivity crisis, addressing inequality, increasing our exports post-Brexit, creating stronger UK GDP growth overall—the north must fire on all cylinders. This means rebalancing the economy. Indeed, many of the challenges in our capital—skyrocketing rents and house prices, the chronic congestion that is economically inefficient and bad for people's health and quality of life—would be much easier to solve if we rebalanced our economy.

I do not wish to deny London the transport investment it requires as the capital city, but the logic of rebalancing the economy was as much about taking pressure off London and the south-east by investing in regenerating the north as it was about keeping up with the incessant demand for massive schemes in and around London. In the digital age, many industries no longer need to cluster in the south-east. The Government have accepted the arguments for rebalancing the economy; now their actions need to follow their words. It is in the national interest that the north—our taxpayers, our fare payers, our businesses—gets its fair share of investment.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** Order. A lot of colleagues want to speak in this debate, so I am imposing an immediate five-minute time limit.

7.58 pm

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate on an incredibly important issue, not just for our region and the whole of the north but for the whole country.

It is easy to look at London and the south-east, its economic success and its levels of infrastructure investment, and simply criticise, but that would be wrong. London and the south have been hugely successful. We should acknowledge and celebrate that success as a good thing and recognise the contribution the region makes to the national economy. What we need to do is replicate that success in the north. It is for us to provide the arguments, the evidence and the reasoning for increased investment in the north and for where that investment should go. It is for us to help to create the successful economic environment in which our region will drive economic success and benefit our constituents and businesses. It is for us to ensure that we do not also miss out on opportunities. There was the chance of a Cumbrian devolution deal. Unfortunately, it failed to materialise, but it would have brought additional investment to my county.

[John Stevenson]

However, we must also recognise the fundamental problem that, for many years and under successive Governments of all colours, our country has become dominated by one city, and, as a consequence, has in many respects become unbalanced economically and socially. A better balance is in the interests of the whole country, not just the south and not just the north. We need to see real, strong economic growth in the northern cities, both large and small, and also in the counties. It is not just about Manchester and Leeds; it is also about towns such as Carlisle, and counties such as Northumberland, Lancashire and Cumbria.

I believe that there are a number of key ways of helping to achieve that. We have seen the introduction of metro Mayors and the devolution of some powers, but that needs to go further. The extension of Mayors throughout the region will provide powerful voices for different parts of our region, and collectively they can speak for the north. We must also bear in mind the importance of skills. We have some magnificent universities in the north, and apprenticeship schemes are now being developed, but they need to be expanded and supported. Infrastructure investment is also vital: we need investment in roads, rail and air, and we should not forget broadband, which is equally important in a modern economy. Political will is critical, at the local as well as the national level.

All credit should be given to the Government for the fact that, to a large extent, a start has been made. Through the concept of the northern powerhouse, the importance of the north has been recognised. I am delighted to say that that includes what I consider to be the “true north”, given the first visit to Carlisle by the northern powerhouse Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry). It has also been recognised that infrastructure is the key. The creation of Transport for the North is significant. Its powers are slightly weaker than those of Transport for London, but if we get behind it, we shall have an opportunity to replicate the success of TfL.

We must not underestimate what is already being done. A total of £13 billion is being invested in transport infrastructure across the north, and an additional £400 million was recently allocated to improving connections in the region. The importance of east-west connectivity has been recognised, and the ambition for Northern Powerhouse Rail is that it will help to transform connectivity within the northern rail network. We must be patient, however. Crossrail did not happen overnight. We must be sure to put the building blocks in place, and accept that it will take time for improvements to follow.

Carlisle now has an enterprise zone which encourages business investment, and is connected to the road system. We have seen rail investment: £14 million for a new station roof, and £2 million for new platforms. A new rail franchise is creating investment in trains and modern carriages, and £11 million has been invested in connections to Dublin and Southend for the local airport. There are to be improvements to the A66 and the A69. Broadband is being extended, and, most important of all is the recent application to complete the ring-road around Carlisle, which would unlock housing and economic potential for the city.

All of us, in all parties, must recognise that decisions such as these can be long term, and can transcend our individual careers and the duration of individual parties in government. They are also vital to the long-term success of the north, and it is important for us to get behind that.

8.3 pm

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing the debate through the Backbench Business Committee. She made a very good presentation. I must also declare an interest, as chair of the all-party parliamentary rail in the north group.

The north-east has a very well-established urban transport system, one of the largest in the United Kingdom, in the Tyne and Wear metro, but it is nearly 40 years old, and much of the rolling stock is up to 37 years old. The trains are increasingly failing, suffering mechanical and electronic faults that cause misery for commuters and the travelling public in general. The rolling stock is well past its best, and requires urgent replacement. The latest estimates suggest that if a replacement programme has not been introduced by 2020, a system that is already literally grinding to a halt could actually collapse.

Along with my colleagues in the Tyne and Wear area, I wrote to the Secretary of State calling for a sensible solution to the problem of funding a replacement. We called on the Government to invest directly in the scheme, as opposed to other funding initiatives such as the private finance initiative. We wrote to the Secretary of State on 17 July 2017 and again on 12 September, and I raised the fact that we had received no answer during Transport questions on 19 October. We have still not received a reply. I fear that that is a symptom of the Government's attitude to investment in the north-east, and to its people.

**Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): The replacement of the rolling stock could provide another boost for the economy of the north-east. It could be built in Newton Aycliffe, which would create many more jobs in the area.

**Ian Mearns:** I would welcome more jobs for the north-east, which was the industrial home of the railways in ancient times.

At present, the people of Tyne and Wear and their parliamentary representatives are being treated with complete contempt by the Government, who have failed to answer a letter from 10 Members of Parliament after more than 120 days. [Interruption.] Conservative Members would not accept that. May I ask you, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether it is normal parliamentary procedure for a letter to a Secretary of State, signed by 10 MPs, to be completely ignored for more than 120 days? I am still waiting.

The latest figures from the Treasury show that investment in infrastructure in the north-east is the second lowest in the UK, the lowest being in Northern Ireland. As we know, Northern Ireland has a financial benefit with which it can do something that will be determined for and by itself. Between 2011 and 2016, investment in the north-east was very low by comparison with the national average, and very low indeed by comparison with investment in London and the south-east. London enjoyed £30 billion of investment, and London and the south-east benefited from nearly 50% of all infrastructure investment.

In the north-east, our commuters regularly endure journeys of less than 15 miles that take more than an hour. The recently completed road-widening scheme on the A1 around the Metro Centre in my constituency has done little to ease that. Another scheme to widen the stretch of A1 alongside the neighbouring constituency has already been delayed until late 2020 in favour of investment elsewhere. Given such a disparity in spending between mine and other regions, my question must be this: why can we not have some investment for the north? “Fair funding” for us would not be fair, because it would not come to terms with that historical lag—the historical disparity that has left us in the doldrums.

The road network in the north-east, and the network that links it with other northern English regions and with Scotland, is beyond a joke. As has already been mentioned, the A1, the A19, the A66 and the A69 all suffer congestion and low travel speeds. The A1 around my constituency and to the west of Newcastle is one of the most heavily congested roads in the country, and the A1M which runs south from Gateshead to Scotch Corner—a distance of less than 40 miles—is motorway in name only. It often takes more than an hour to travel 40 miles on something that is designated a motorway. It is all too often dangerous, as is the A1 North link between Tyneside and Scotland.

Our internal regional railways are antiquated, uncomfortable and painfully slow. The region that gave this nation its railways is being left behind: that is beyond dispute. The right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin) stood at the Dispatch Box and told us that by 2035, HS2 would cut journey times from London to Newcastle via Leeds by 20 minutes. Twenty years ago we could travel by train from Newcastle to London in two hours and 38 minutes, and in 20 years’ time, with HS2, the journey will be 20 minutes faster. So 40 years will have elapsed, we will have spent £56 billion, and we will have saved 20 minutes on the journey time from Newcastle to London. This will increase capacity, but it will do nothing for the economy of the north-east until we get the north-east’s transport infrastructure improved dramatically. We are being ignored.

8.10 pm

**Rishi Sunak** (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): The average commute into London begins 40 miles outside of the city. If we could make that the case for Manchester, we could create an urban network with a population larger than that of New York, and with a GDP the size of Sweden. That is the scale of the prize for getting northern transport right.

Tonight I would like to make three quick points: first, I want to celebrate the powerhouse that the north already is; secondly, I want to talk about the role that transport will play in shaping the north’s future; and lastly, I want to suggest a few key projects that will ensure that the future is bright.

When I hear the phrase “northern powerhouse”, I must admit that my heart sometimes sinks, because I know that too often I am about to hear a story of the past—the north as the land of the spinning jenny—or I am to be told about a far too distant future of hyperloops across the Yorkshire dales. Instead of talking about the past or the far future, let us not forget today that Britain’s 16 million northerners are already the nation’s

economic engine. Last year, it was not London or the south-east that saw the highest growth; it was the north-west. Thanks to Nissan’s Sunderland car plant, Britain is, for the first time since England won the World cup, producing more cars than the French. Off Yorkshire’s east coast, Hull-made turbines are creating the world’s largest offshore wind farm. In science, the north’s 29 universities—including world-class institutions like Durham, York and Newcastle—are at the forefront of our cutting-edge research. And, in Manchester United, the north is home to the most successful sporting franchise anywhere in the world.

But in the area of transport, we are still selling the north’s potential short. The cities and towns of the north are individually strong, but collectively are not strong enough. The only way to get the north to punch beyond the collective sum of its parts is to connect those parts. That is why better transport is key to unlocking the north’s true potential.

Today, converted buses known as Pacer trains, a technology phased out more than 12 years ago by Iran’s national railway, are still in use across the north. Today, it is quicker to travel 283 miles from London to Paris than to travel less than half that distance between Hull and Liverpool. And today, too often bright, young entrepreneurial minds forged in northern schools and universities find it easier to come 200 miles to London to find a job than to look in a northern city just 40 miles away.

But it does not have to be like this. After all, the distance between Manchester and Leeds is shorter than the length of the London underground’s central line. The Government, to their credit, recognise the need for investment—and in my constituency upgrades to the A1 and A66 are welcome—but there is much more to do.

The northern powerhouse is a wonderful phrase, but the people of northern England deserve more than a slogan; they need action. How do we make the aspiration a reality? There is no doubt that there has been a substantial funding gap between London transport and northern transport under successive Governments.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I asked this question of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), but does my hon. Friend agree with me that this lack of investment has been happening for generations, and that it is not a party political issue? We should be working cross-party to deliver the solutions we all know we need.

**Rishi Sunak:** My hon. Friend has done excellent work analysing these numbers, and I completely agree with his point that it is multigenerational. The point is that, from now on, that gap needs to start closing.

Secondly, London has Crossrail, the midlands is getting HS2, and now we in the north need the Government to back Northern Powerhouse Rail. The Government’s £300 million down-payment is certainly welcome, but we will need a lot more to show the people of the north that the Government mean business.

Thirdly, in my own area, the new Tees Valley Mayor has campaigned to upgrade Darlington station, to vastly improve its capacity and connectivity. It is an excellent proposal and the Government should get behind it.

[Rishi Sunak]

Fourthly, from Teesside to Merseyside, and from Tyneside to the Humber, one of the north's many strengths are its great ports. As I set out last year, after we leave the EU we should create a new generation of US-style free ports to turbocharge manufacturing, trade and employment in our great northern port cities.

Finally, we must make sure that the rural north is not left behind. Advances like autonomous vehicles will have their biggest impact in sparsely populated rural areas like mine—for example, by allowing elderly constituents to access distant health services more easily, or stimulating our local economies by allowing people to head to the pub without worrying about who will drive home.

It might seem strange to hear all this from a boy born in Southampton, but I am deeply proud to now call the north my home. So as long as I have a voice in this House, I will speak up loudly and forcefully for my home's bright future, and for an economy that, with the right investment, can be the powerhouse not just of Britain but of the world.

8.16 pm

**Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and the hon. Members for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and for Shipley (Philip Davies) for securing this debate. It is timely because there is a growing recognition that insufficient investment is going into transport in the north.

I do not see tonight's debate as being about left against right, nor do I see it simply as being about north versus south. This debate should be about how we ensure that the north gets a fair deal from national Government, and I want to work with Members from across the House to persuade the current Government to invest more, and then to ensure that the Government after that and the one after that also invest more, because if we are to address the inequalities that undoubtedly exist in levels of investment between the north and areas in London and the south of England, investment over the longer term will be required.

What is the best way of doing that? It is partly about devolution. Some devolution deals have relatively recently been agreed—not so far in Yorkshire, but in Manchester, Liverpool and elsewhere. Their newly elected mayors have already established themselves as important voices in our national debate. Alongside that, Transport for the North was formed in 2015 as the first sub-regional transport body in the UK, and many of us were hopeful that it would become a powerful advocate for rebalancing our economy and closing the divide in investment between north and south, with the powers to back that up.

But the reality is that in recent times we seem to have hit the buffers. The Transport Secretary recently told the *Yorkshire Post* that it was not his responsibility to invest in Yorkshire's railways. That came shortly after he unilaterally cancelled electrification projects planned for some of the busiest train routes in the country outside London. This is but one example of the stark inequalities that exist between the transport infrastructure of different regions of our country, a point that has been very effectively made by the *Yorkshire Post*, which has long campaigned on these issues and which, under the

editorship of James Mitchinson, has been a powerful voice not just for Yorkshire and the Humber, but for the north more generally.

I think we all accept that London, as our capital city, is a hub for business and tourism, and it is understandable that it will receive a significant amount of investment. But the figures show just how wide the inequality between London and the north has become. According to the Institute for Public Policy Research, analysis of investment over the past 10 years shows that London received £680 per head on average each year while the north got just £282 per head. If the north had received the same level of funding as London, we would have had an additional £59 billion to spend in the last decade.

In many other European countries, decisions about transport spending are made locally or regionally. In other words, they are made by those best placed to understand the problems and priorities in their area. However, recent news highlighted by the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme raises real concerns about the future direction of Transport for the North. We now know that, on current planning, it will be only a pale imitation of Transport for London. It will have an advisory role but it will not be able to determine or deliver transport priorities. If the Government were really serious about giving that organisation teeth, they would be more ambitious about its remit. Transport for London has been effective in securing additional investment in our capital city. Why should the north of England not have the same?

Transport infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth. Strong transport links between our cities and towns attract businesses, allow people to work over a wider geographical area and increase productivity. Public investment in transport leverages further private transport investment. The reality is that the northern powerhouse will never truly get off the ground without increased transport investment. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North said in her recent *Yorkshire Post* article, the north currently faces the worst of both worlds in that we will not have the money to fund our transport projects and we will not be given the power to raise the money ourselves.

8.21 pm

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. As I have said to many previous Transport Ministers, I have 10 railway stations, the largest port in the country and an international airport in my constituency. We therefore deserve better service from the Department than we have received in recent years. However, there is no doubt that the northern powerhouse has been a focus for the Government, and it is delivering some major investment into the north of England. We should be fair to the Government and acknowledge that.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Will he join me in expressing appreciation for the recent investment committed for the Middlewich bypass in my constituency? We have been over 20 years in the waiting. It will not only relieve congestion in the area but open up land to bring new employment into the area in the form of more than 2,000 jobs.

**Martin Vickers:** I am very happy to support that, and I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. As I said, we should recognise the fact that there has been significant investment in some parts. The Minister for Transport Legislation and Maritime, my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes), visited my constituency in August to formally open the A160 upgrade, which gives access to the port of Immingham. Of course, the problem is that we can have very nice access but once we leave Immingham, we hit the very congested A180. The last 15 or 20 miles into Grimsby and Cleethorpes are on a dual carriageway before we get on to the M180.

Yes, the northern powerhouse has attracted significant investment, but we should also acknowledge the fact that many of the plans involve investment between the larger cities of the north—Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and the like—and that there has been some neglect of Humberside, if I dare to use that word, which is derided in northern Lincolnshire. In particular, the south bank of the Humber is in desperate need of a number of important developments.

The devolution argument has centred around metropolitan areas and around metro mayors. In my own county of Lincolnshire, the devolution deal that was on offer this time last year eventually collapsed. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) mentioned that a similar thing had happened in Cumbria. In the north of Lincolnshire, the two unitary authorities serving parts of my constituency—North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire—both supported the devolution deal, so it is quite unfair that we should then somehow be dropped out of the potential investment into the area because the deal was thwarted by other councils. As I have said many times, if the Government really believe in devolution, metro mayors and unitary authorities, they should get on and establish them. That might be somewhat contrary to the devolution argument in some respects, but I have repeatedly said that we should get on with this, because unitary authorities are the way forward. They release more resources for other investment.

The big ask in transport terms for my own constituency—I acknowledge that this is not directly the Minister's responsibility—is a direct rail service from Grimsby and Cleethorpes through Scunthorpe to the main line and onward to King's Cross. In days gone by, British Rail operated such a service, but it abandoned it in 1992. It is fair to say that the privatised networks now provide a better service from my constituency to London—there is in effect an hourly service—but the fact that we have to change at either Doncaster or Newark is off-putting and particularly detrimental to many of the businesses that are becoming established in the area. Open access train operators have shown an interest, and I would urge the Department to consider allowing greater involvement for successful operators such as Hull Trains and Grand Central, which operate services out of King's Cross. The Secretary of State gave a much more favourable answer to a question about open access operators when he responded at the last Transport questions.

The Brigg line is also worthy of mention. It operates a Saturdays-only service. The people in Worksop, Retford, Gainsborough and Brigg would love to be able to get to Cleethorpes on a Saturday. I see that the Chairman of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), is in her place.

I travelled that line with her a year or two ago. It is nonsense to have all that infrastructure in place for a service that operates only on one day a week.

Finally, I want to mention HS2. I have been a supporter of HS2 and I recognise that we need a new north-south railway line. If we are going to build one, we must build it to the highest modern standards. However, the reality is that we are talking about delivering a project in 2033, so would it really matter if it was 2035 or 2036? In the meantime, we could release some extra funding for major projects. A few bypasses in some of our constituencies would not go amiss, for example. They would certainly be more valued by many of our constituents, who will miss out on the HS2 project. I can see that time is running out. The Minister is an influential man, and I know that he is sympathetic to the needs of northern Lincolnshire, so I am hoping for a positive response later in the debate.

8.27 pm

**Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab):** It is a real pleasure to follow my northern Lincolnshire friend, the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), but first let me congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on setting out the debate so well and reminding us that this is not just about transport but about rebalancing the economy. As the hon. Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) said, there is a prize to be grabbed here. There is an opportunity, through investment, to do something about the productivity gap that continues to widen, to address regional inequalities and to do something about the gap in investment. Transport can be the real motor for that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley Central (Dan Jarvis) said, if the same amount that has been spent in London over the past decade was spent in the north, we would have seen £59 billion more—a staggering piece of information.

A constituent has written to me, and I want to give a flavour of his take on this debate, because it provides an insight into how people see things locally. Dave Roberts writes:

“You probably already know that, as well as backtracking on the several rail electrification projects promised for the North, the powers and finance to be given to TfN (Transport for the North) are much less than those enjoyed by TfL (Transport for London).

As far as I am aware the Scunthorpe area does not seem to have been included in any of the proposals made for transport in the North. The major proposal seems to be... a new high-speed rail line between Hull and Liverpool. Relatively little extra work would be required to link the current line from Cleethorpes through Scunthorpe to this HS3 line.”

Those are powerful insights into the opportunities that could be utilised with proper investment. The danger for northern Lincolnshire is that not only are we neglected as part of the north, but we are also neglected as part of the northern project. As the hon. Member for Cleethorpes mentioned, Immingham is the largest port in the country by volume and having that port in the heart of our area should mean good transport links, but the links are still woeful despite the recent welcome investment in the A160. The A180 also ought to be upgraded.

**Martin Vickers:** The M11 was originally proposed to run from the Peterborough-Cambridge area, where it finishes now, up to the Humber bridge. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that having that as a long-term prospect would boost the north Lincolnshire economy?

**Nic Dakin:** The hon. Gentleman is certainly ambitious. However, hauliers in the area will say that the problems with the A15 going south mean that the situation is poor. Investment in and dualling the A15 would make a significant difference to transport links in our area and would build on the concept of an M11-type development. Improvements to the railways would also help. The nature of the line through northern Lincolnshire means that freight trains in particular have to go slow in parts, and strengthening that line would make a significant difference to both the east-west and north-south movement of freight in our area. Railtrack improvement and investment in the A15 would make a significant difference.

We welcome the fact that the coalition Government significantly reduced the Humber bridge tolls after eventually listening to a multi-partner argument, but it is interesting to hear that the Severn bridge tolls are going to disappear altogether. What is good for the south ought to be good for the north, and we ought to have a similar approach to issues in the north. The hon. Member for Cleethorpes also mentioned the value of a direct rail link to our area from London and more investment in the Brigg line, which would benefit Kirton in Lindsey in my constituency and other movement through the area. If the Humber area of northern Lincolnshire, Hull and the east riding is to be the “energy estuary”, we need investment to allow the area to blossom. Transport for the North needs to be given the powers and resources to deliver for the north, but it also needs to remember northern Lincolnshire.

8.32 pm

**Lee Rowley** (North East Derbyshire) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to speak in this evening’s debate. I stand here as the MP for an east midlands constituency; I hope Members with constituencies further north will allow me to contribute tonight, particularly given that many of my constituents regularly use Sheffield and travel to the north by both rail and road.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate, which is important for ensuring that the north has the right level of investment and spending in transport over the long term. Everyone on both sides of the House would agree about the importance of that. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) that this can and should be a relatively non-partisan issue, and I am glad that most of the speeches so far today have been in that spirit.

We need to start by recognising the enormous amount spent and the improvements that have happened over the last few years. Some £13 billion is being spent at the moment. A couple of months ago, we had the commitment to northern powerhouse rail, and the mere setting-up of Transport for the North should be acknowledged as step forward, even accepting the governance issues that remain to be discussed. In my constituency and the associated nearby town of Chesterfield, however, we have significant transport issues and have done for several years. When I was growing up in Chesterfield in the 1980s, people did not want to go to the station. The rolling stock was grotty, and it was often difficult to get a train on time.

I am pleased that over the past 10 to 15 years, as a result of spending by successive Governments, there have been significant improvements for my constituents in North East Derbyshire and for people living in north

Derbyshire as a whole. We have a relatively new station in Chesterfield that opened just a few years ago. We have a franchise that is clearly working well, which is testament to how the franchise system can work. The regular trains to London run on time and are clean and relatively efficient, although obviously more can be done.

We can see real progress in Chesterfield, but we should always seek improvements and developments, and I will draw attention to that in my remaining time. First, I recognise that a number of franchises are being retendered, particularly Northern and the midland main line. I hope some of that will have an impact on my constituency, particularly at Dronfield station, where passenger throughput has quintupled over the past 10 years. The station is a real success story in Derbyshire, and it shows how rail can help towns to prosper.

The service changes proposed in some of the franchise documents will not necessarily come to pass, particularly the splitting of the Liverpool to Norwich route at Sheffield, which would force a number of my constituents to change trains to go over the Pennines. Before I joined this place in June I was a regular train user, both over to Manchester on a daily basis in my immediately previous job and regularly to Liverpool in the job before that. I recognise some of the statements made by Members on both sides of the House today about how we need to improve rail infrastructure as a whole.

There is also an argument for talking more about roads. The vast majority of people in my constituency travel by road rather than rail, although I would encourage them to use the good rail links from Chesterfield, and we do need increased investment in roads. The A61 Derby Road at the bottom of Chesterfield cuts through my constituency. It is one of the most constrained and congested A roads in the east midlands, if not the country, and it needs urgent attention. A real solution is needed that will actually solve the problems we have had over a number of decades. There were problems when I was growing up, and I was there when there were problems 16 years ago. There are still problems, and I do not want people to have those problems in 16 years’ time.

This debate has been relatively good natured and very constructive, and I hope that continues. The reality is that we have to get the spending in the north correct. We have to recognise that there is a historical anomaly and a historical imbalance in that spending, but we cannot do it all at once. We need to welcome the progress that has been made, and we need to hope that there is more to come.

8.37 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate.

Our nation’s transport infrastructure deservedly occupies much of this Chamber’s deliberations. Transport has been a frequent topic of my contributions, and it will remain so until the north of England gets the improved transport connectivity it so desperately needs. Modern, efficient transport infrastructure is a catalyst to growth. Improved regional transport connectivity is the key to unlocking prosperity in my home city of Bradford, and it is essential to fostering wider prosperity across West Yorkshire and the whole of the north of England. It is fundamental to addressing the regional differentials in our economy.

To put it bluntly, the north has had a raw deal from Whitehall. The huge potential in my home city of Bradford and in other towns and cities across the north of England is being held back by creaking infrastructure and a lack of transport investment. It is quicker to travel from London to Paris on Eurostar than it is to travel by rail from Liverpool to Hull. That can and must change, and investment is the key.

Public spending per person on transport in the north of England over the past 10 years was less than half that in London, and that differential is set to get much, much wider. If the north of England had received the same per person as London over these past 10 years, transport, economic performance and prosperity in the north would be in a very different position, and our nation would be better for it. That is central to our debate today, as are economic growth, opportunity, new jobs and prosperity for the north and the nation.

As the Chancellor appreciates, the UK is woefully underperforming compared with other advanced economies when it comes to productivity gains. Without improved productivity, our communities in the north will become incrementally poorer. When the Government talk about fixing this country's productivity problem, their response must address regional differences. It would be a travesty indeed if average productivity nationally was raised but the improvements continued to be centred in the London and the south-east, rather than being distributed evenly across the UK. That would be a huge missed opportunity, but I fear that is exactly where the Government are heading.

I say that because while Yorkshire's M62/M606 improvement is under threat on value-for-money concerns, Highways England has committed to multi-million pound investments in the south-east and, in particular, in London. It is systematic bias, and it is at the very heart of the problem. Because of the regional differences in economic performance, these value-for-money judgments on transport infrastructure are skewed. They favour London and are self-reinforcing: London gets investment, its economy benefits and so future investment there looks yet more attractive. This must stop. The Government need to get a better lens through which to view infrastructure investment in the north: one that sets out to solve the problem of regional difference, not one that reinforces it. They need a system that directs investment to the service of rebalancing our economy across the regions.

To make that a reality, all tiers of government must have a programme of strategically planned, long-term and targeted investment. A vital first call on the Government is that they reaffirm their commitment to the trans-Pennine rail electrification.

**Ian Mearns:** What my hon. Friend is saying gets to the nub of the whole problem. The Department for Transport has to make economic development a priority as opposed to the alleviation of congestion; if it is about the alleviation of congestion, the money goes to London.

**Judith Cummins:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, with which I wholeheartedly agree.

As I was saying, this vital infrastructure project promises not only improved journey times, connecting the economies of the north, but, equally importantly, increasing capacity to support the easy movement of labour across the regional economic area, providing more people with

better access to good jobs. The experience of tens of thousands of hard-pressed rail passengers each day is that extra capacity is urgently needed in the north. Many have turned their backs on the railways, as their experience has been so abysmal. That experience goes a long way to explaining why the road traffic flow between Bradford and Leeds, two close neighbours, is by far the highest in the country. Any strategic, long-term and targeted investment plan must recognise that, increasingly, different regions of the UK need a tailored approach, but it must also put regions in the driving seat—with powers and with responsibilities. The north is willing to step up, but the Government need to help and trust the region to get the job done.

8.42 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing it. There is something more important than Transport for the North here, and it has been mentioned in everybody's remarks: we are looking to get a fair deal in terms of not only spending, although that is clearly important and I am keen on it, but fair opportunities—business and job opportunities—for people across the north. We believe that transport should lead to that point.

The Brexit vote exemplified how people in the north do not feel they are getting a fair deal; they feel they are being left behind, and the figures amply illustrate that. For example, the average gross domestic product in London is £45,000 per head per annum, whereas the figure for the north-east is £18,000. Our Chancellor has said that the difference between the second city in the UK and London, our first city, is greater in economic terms than is the difference in any other country in Europe. Andy Haldane, the chief economist of the Bank of England, has also said that we are at the bottom of the league table on regional disparity; our cities do much worse than other cities, particularly those in Germany.

So the key question is: what do we do to redress that balance? Interestingly, the Institute of Economic Affairs does not think that putting more money into infrastructure is the right thing to do. It said:

“Even if it worked theoretically, timing problems create challenges, whilst cutting spending in ‘good times’ is resisted.”

The investment lag does not bring the return. I do not accept that perspective.

If we consider the industrial revolution, we can talk about Hargreaves and his spinning jenny or Watt and his steam engine. The key thing about the industrial revolution for Josiah Wedgwood was that he could not get his product around the country. He had to persuade the Government and investors to invest in roads and canals so that he could; otherwise, the industrial revolution would have petered out. Any businessperson will say that they want the Government to put the infrastructure into place, and then business will come in to fill the gap.

It is clear that it has worked for London. As Members from all parties have said, London gets a much better deal in terms of the investment per person. As the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) said, the key thing is getting people around the country. It used to be about goods, but now it is about people: the most important thing is to be able to move people around quickly.

**Rishi Sunak:** Does my hon. Friend agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) that the Treasury and the Department for Transport need to consider economic development and the rebalancing of the economy as criteria for the allocation of new money, so that it does not go only to the places that are already economically vibrant?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I absolutely agree. I have looked at the figures in detail and, as my hon. Friend said in his speech, the distribution of central Government spending is much more level before other factors are added in. In London, the money allocated by central Government per person per year is about £40 per person, but if other investment is added in—from the European Investment Bank, local authorities and private finance—that is when the disparity occurs. We have to find mechanisms to make sure that the north gets a fair deal. It is not just about central Government distributing money unfairly; other factors are at work, which is why we need to work across party lines to make sure we can deliver a solution.

As I said earlier, the way things are now is how they have been for decades—for generations—so we all need to work together. It is not just north versus south; it is principally London versus the rest of the country. We have a big constituency of MPs and businesses right across the country who have a stake in making sure that we get a fair deal, but we need to look behind the broad, headline figures, because it is simply not right that the Chancellor is allocating lots of money to London and not to the rest of the country. Other factors are at work that we need to take into account and find solutions for.

Once we have found those solutions, there are so many projects that we need to support. It is absolutely right that we should look at northern powerhouse rail or HS3. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) said, we need to look at extending the M11 up to the Humber bridge. We need a tunnel across the Pennines. We also need to look at the small regional roads, such as the A59 and the A1079 in my constituency, and particularly the A64, on which a journey of around 40 miles from York to Scarborough can take two hours. We need more funding for the smaller, less high-profile projects that are so critical to our local economies. If we can get the money—if the people holding the purse strings will give us the tools—we can do the job.

8.48 pm

**Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab):** There is obviously a big issue with the disparity between the investment in the transport infrastructure in the north-east of England and the investment elsewhere. We have bus networks that are dislocated, and in rural areas probably non-existent. The road networks are congested and the rail network is neglected. The Institute for Public Policy Research says that half of planned transport spending will go to London, with the north receiving £427 per person, compared with nearly £2,000 per person in London. In fact, over the past five years transport expenditure in the north-east was £3.1 billion, while in London it was £30 billion—in the north-east it is only a tenth of what it is in London.

On the road network, the two main north to south roads through the north-east are the A1, which goes through the centre of Sedgefield, and the A19. The upgrade of the A1 stops at Scotch Corner. It seems as if that upgrade has been going on for years—anyone just

has to travel on that road to feel it. Ironically, the A19 is the most congested road. We desperately need a new A19 crossing over the River Tees. Councillor Bill Dixon, leader of Darlington Borough Council and Chair of the Transport Committee for the Tees Valley combined authority, said that, for far too long, residents of Tees Valley have suffered frustration and delays because our major roads are not equipped to deal with the volume of traffic. The A19 crossing is necessary.

There is also a need for a relief road, which is mentioned in the combined authority's plans, at junction 60 on the A1, just outside Newton Aycliffe, home to the biggest industrial estate, down to Great Burdon on the A66 to give further access to Teesport. Companies such as Stiller, the road haulier company, say that there is a need for such access. It means that the road would cut past the small village of Brafferton. Any change that takes place must be done sensitively, with the views of the local people taken into consideration.

**Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab):** May I take the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech and to mention another reason for needing the road? The residents of Darlington have suffered large vehicles going very close to their homes, with big impacts on road safety and air quality.

**Phil Wilson:** Yes, I know that from going down North Road to the railway station to get to London. It takes a long time to get down there, so the congestion must be relieved.

On the railway infrastructure, there has been talk about the Leamside line, which runs down to Tursdale, just north of Ferryhill, which is in my constituency. There has been talk of refurbishing that line for decades now. I remember it being discussed back in the 1980s. To refurbish that route would alleviate a lot of pressure on the east coast main line, and help to ensure that commuters can get from the Tyne to the Tees, and vice versa. It could also lead to the reopening of a station at Ferryhill, which closed many years ago and which commuters could use to get to both the Tyne and the Tees. It would also help the local economy in Ferryhill.

Hitachi, the rail builders, are in my constituency. Although HS2 is a controversial project, Hitachi has been shortlisted to build the rolling stock, which is a £2 billion-plus contract and will create a lot of jobs for the local area. That is important for the north-east and we should not forget it. The actual factory has brought train building full circle. Locomotion No.1 was assembled there back in 1825, and the company is now building the bimodal trains. The Government asked for those trains to be built, because they knew that electrification of the railway would not go forward in the way that we expected.

The last matter I want to mention is Durham Tees Valley Airport, which is also in my constituency. Owned by Peel Airports, it has been through troubled times over the past few years. It only has two routes now: to Schiphol and to Aberdeen. Peel wants to ensure that the airport can be kept open into the future. The newly elected Conservative mayor of Tees Valley says that he wants to nationalise the airport. A few months ago, I asked the Transport Secretary about the plans for nationalising regional airports, and he said that there were not any, which I found interesting as it was the main campaign issue for the Conservative mayor.

Questions need to be asked. If the Minister has had discussions, perhaps he can help us. What kind of nationalisation are we talking about? Is it state-owned nationalisation or a workers' co-operative? Are we talking about socialism in one airport or is this a Trojan horse? Is it a transitional demand that would lead to the full nationalisation of all the regional airports in the country? We need answers today. Maybe the main thing that should be considered for Durham Tees Valley airport is a third runway at Heathrow. We need investment in the north-east because we have a lot to say but we need the transport infrastructure to spread the news.

8.55 pm

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate. It is a real pleasure and very worth while to follow not only my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgfield (Phil Wilson), but so many Members who are speaking from coastal areas in the north. Very often, this debate is characterised by the need for the main cities to be connected up, but of course there are many areas in urgent need of economic development.

As a Parliament, we have to decide what kind of country we want to represent. Is it one in which certain areas get more and more prosperous while others are left to wither, or is it one—I hope that everyone in the Chamber wants this—in which we value communities that are more cut-off from other areas and in which we want to invest in transport to change that? Other areas are obviously not as enticing and attractive as Barrow-in-Furness in my constituency. Nevertheless, they form part of an important economic case.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) for making the case for economic development. We urgently need the Government to change the way in which they make these calculations. We are not talking about a “Field of Dreams”, Kevin Costner-style, “If we build it, they will come” situation. There are already clear economic plans and potential in these areas, but that potential needs to be unlocked. If the Minister and the Government want to relieve congestion in overheated areas in the longer term, they should bring up the economic development of the north of England so that people have more economic opportunities to go elsewhere, rather than feeling that they must be sucked down into the overcrowded, over-congested hell holes that some Members in the south are unfortunate enough to have to represent.

I will confine the rest of my remarks to the need for transport infrastructure, development and investment in Barrow and Furness, and the south and west of Cumbria. I will take the unusual step of speaking on behalf of the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), who has ironically not been able to get to this debate due to chronic delays in her journey getting down here. She and I are as one in advocating the need for road and rail improvements to connect what can be world-class civil nuclear jobs in the west of Cumbria, with Sellafield and its international decommissioning role, Moorside—the Minister knows from his previous role the importance of keeping the Moorside deal on track—and military nuclear in the submarine programme.

Going back to the Minister's previous experience, I have met him on the way up to, I assumed, the Moorside and west Cumbria area, so he will know about the

appalling transport links between what ought to be a global centre of nuclear excellence. I challenge any other Member to intervene and tell me a worse case than that between Sellafield and BAE Systems. It is ostensibly an A-road going through a farmyard—a single track connecting these two areas of global nuclear excellence. It has to be fixed. We need more clarity from the Government on the major road network, how it will add to the strategic road network and how we will be able to bid.

In my final 40 seconds, let me focus on rail and on the state of the Cumbrian coastal line and the Furness line. We are in utterly dire straits. I have tabled an official question today to deal with one aspect of the catastrophe of the terrible unreliability of the Furness line—the dire need for rolling stock. Almost daily, children are left unable to get home. We need bus services, and we need urgent investment in this line. I hope the Minister listens to us.

9 pm

**Emma Hardy** (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this debate.

Since being elected in June and spending half my working week in the bright lights and big city of London, the disparity between the infrastructure down here and back home in west Hull and Hessle has hit me hard. If the House will indulge me for just a moment, it is the evening, we are getting sleepy, and it is time for a story called “The Tale of Two Cities”. A few nights ago, I had to travel to Lewisham via Charing Cross station. When I arrived, I was immediately struck by how quiet it was. All I could hear were the footsteps of the commuters as they ignored each other on their way home. As I walked to my train, I was puzzling out why the station did not sound the same as the one in Hull and why the air was different. At first I wondered, “Is it just because the stereotype of people from the north being more chatty and friendly is true?” but that did not explain the difference in the air. As my train pulled away, the answer struck me: “Of course! The reason why the station is silent and the air is different is that all the trains are electric.” There are no noisy engines spewing out diesel fumes or creating dirt in London. A conscious decision has been made to save the people of London from these polluting, deafening trains and to give them cleaner, greener and faster trains. A conscious decision has been made to leave those slow and polluting trains in the north. Clearly, there is little evidence of the best of times for northerners.

The Government are putting local authorities under pressure to clean up toxic air, but that would put my city of Hull in a difficult position, because, as the Campaign for Better Transport states,

“Diesel engines score badly for nitrogen oxide...and particulate emissions.”

It gave two examples of breaches in limits for NO<sub>x</sub> caused by diesel trains—one at London Paddington in 2015, and one involving 50% higher emissions up to 200 metres either side of the east coast main line.

The Labour-run council in Hull is doing everything it can to improve prospects for people living there. What we have done this year as the capital of culture has defied our fiercest critics, and we are creating quality jobs. This Government claim to believe in equality of

[Emma Hardy]

opportunity, but actions speak louder than words, and we face not having the spare transport capacity to accommodate growth. Rail journeys are also slower, and the road network is becoming increasingly congested.

The lack of investment in the north is hindering our development. Yes, okay, the Government pledged £330 million to improve rail transport, but that is for the whole of the north, and the Transport for London budget for rail, not including underground rail, is £600 million. Then the Government offered us bimodal trains, the problems of which have been highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North.

Then we come to roads and the infamous junction on Castle Street in my constituency—a junction the Minister might already have some understanding of and which he might be slightly tired of hearing about. The road connects Hull city centre in the west to the dock areas of the port of Hull in the east. Estimates by Highways England have stated that 47,000 vehicles travel along the road every day from the city to the port. This level of usage demonstrates that Castle Street is a vital arterial road for the economy of Hull and the surrounding area. At present, the level of usage on the road is unsustainable and creates large amounts of congestion, which can lead to significant delays in journeys, particularly at peak times, and to significant costs to local businesses using the road.

It was planned to submit the development consent order to the Government in May. Then it was delayed to October. Now it has been delayed until summer next year. This saga has been going on since 2009, and it cannot be delayed any further. I met the Secretary of State and the Minister the week before last, asking for two things: I wanted the building of the bridge across the A63 brought forward, and I wanted the Secretary of State to write to Highways England to demand that there will no further delays to this project and that the development consent order will be accepted. Credit where it is due: he did meet Highways England and it has agreed to bring forward the building of the bridge, but I still do not have the reassurance that I need that the project will not be delayed any further. Will the Minister therefore take this opportunity to offer the people of Hull West and Hessle the reassurances we need on this vital development?

The rejection, during this Parliament, of the electrification of railways in my constituency, and delay after delay to our road development, are limiting our future economic development and the improvement in air quality that residents need. Without the level of investment Labour promised in our manifesto, these “worst of times” show no sign of ending.

9.5 pm

**Grahame Morris** (Easington) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate, which is really important and timely, and thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting it.

The A19 is one of the principal economic drivers—no pun intended—in my constituency. It is vital for the export-focused manufacturing businesses in my region, particularly Caterpillar, NSK Bearings, and—until it

closes just before Christmas—the Walkers potato crisp factory. Many businesses are dependent on a functioning A19, which too often is left at a standstill for hours on end following multiple road accidents, which are almost a daily occurrence. The lack of investment, maintenance and upgrading of this vital economic highway is clearly holding back businesses in my constituency. I have tabled numerous questions on this, and I urge Conservative MPs who want to work co-operatively to sign early-day motion 267. The Government have yet to deliver on a proper investment strategy for this vital road. We need a Government with some foresight who seek to future-proof our infrastructure and support the development of our regional economy. The billions that, as colleagues have mentioned, are being ploughed into Crossrail in London, which already has an embarrassment of riches in terms of excellent public transport links, will see the capital pull further away from the regions, particularly the northern regions.

I welcome the Government’s decision to invest in the new railway station at Horden, which will create much needed links with towns all across the region. However, that needs to be linked with a new fleet of trains and improvements at Seaham station—and of course we need to keep the guard on the train. If we genuinely want to rebalance the economy, an airport congestion charge would help to lower airfares in under-utilised regional airports like our own at Newcastle and Durham Tees Valley while charging a premium to use the most congested and polluting airports like Heathrow. The Metro system is a fantastic service serving the people of Newcastle and Sunderland, but we need it to connect our entire region. I will never stop calling for the Metro to be extended into my constituency. However, this seems like a fanciful dream when we consider that the Government are still haggling over the replacement of the Metro trains, which are 47 years old, and rolling stock that is simply not fit for purpose. The Government need to replace their rhetoric with action.

The north-east is a fantastic region, neglected by Governments who have been unwilling to invest and support a better future. My constituency offers many hidden gems. We have a vibrant and active arts community, with the East Durham Artists Network. There are iconic public artworks such as the Tommy and Marra statues. We have an award-winning heritage coastline, with the England coastal path running through my constituency. There is the local nature reserve in Easington and our ancient woodland of Castle Eden Dene. These are hidden gems, and they will remain so until we have the infrastructure that will connect our past and our heritage to our future.

The north-east and east Durham have the skills, the history and the heritage to succeed in business, manufacturing, and tourism. What we lack is a Government who are committed to delivering real investment for our region. I commend Durham County Council and all the local authorities in the region for working around some of the most difficult budget cuts imposed by central Government, which have disproportionately affected my region and my constituency. The longer we allow the lack of investment to continue, the greater the economic divide between London and the south-east and the rest of the country will become. The Government need to future-proof our infrastructure, invest in our economy and reap the benefits of a more prosperous north-east.

9.10 pm

**Jo Platt** (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this important debate. Like many colleagues, I have been contacted by a number of constituents who have highlighted the problems that they face with transport and infrastructure in the constituency. Although many of the points they raised are specific and pertinent to Leigh, many of my constituents' concerns form part of the wider economic and social problems that towns in the north face.

Small businesses tell me of their struggles when their customers find it extremely difficult to travel into town, with limited public transport provision and no train station in the constituency. Commuters have told me of their struggles with out-of-town train stations, which are difficult to access and have limited parking; and with overcrowded carriages, which add to the frustration of not having access to their own local station. Residents have told me of their struggle to remain engaged with their community when their bus services have been dramatically cut, severing critical transport links for thousands of people.

**Tracy Brabin** (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that for people with no other option, the withdrawal of a bus service can be devastating? Despite that, 400 supported routes have been downgraded or cut, year on year, since 2010. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) has said, my region of Yorkshire and Humber has experienced local transport funding cuts of 37%. I am not going to ask the Minister for more money—I am sure he would say no—but can he, in his summing up, please explain to us why the Government are denying my area the bus franchise powers needed to improve services?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: Order. The hon. Lady could have made a speech if she wanted to, but this is rather a long intervention at this stage in the evening, and it will stop someone else speaking. I will allow her to ask her question very quickly.

**Tracy Brabin**: Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker; I appreciate your patience. If the power to deliver more services is good enough for London, Manchester and Liverpool, surely it is good enough for Batley and Spen.

**Jo Platt**: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, and I completely agree with her.

My constituency was among many in the north that formed the engine of the industrial revolution. I am going to include the spinning jenny, seeing as everyone else has done so. The key to my constituency's success was not only the ingenious and powerful inventions, but its connectivity to the regional and national economy. However, since then the country has turned its back on the industrious and innovative towns of the north.

Although there has, since the 1980s, rightly been investment in our great northern cities—Manchester to the east, and Liverpool to the west—our crumbling transport infrastructure cannot cope with demand and suffers from chronic underinvestment. Our road and motorway networks are gridlocked, our trains are over capacity and, with cuts to local authority budgets, our public transport system no longer serves the most disconnected in our communities.

Great things were promised to the residents of Leigh when HS2 was announced. It would boost connectivity and the regional economy, and the disruption would be mitigated by the benefits of improved infrastructure. Instead, however, HS2 is due to split my constituency in two, uprooting residents and causing enormous disruption. Leigh will be the largest town in the north without a rail station, and I am aware of no current plans to connect Leigh with any station. To add insult to injury, when I asked the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), who has responsibility for HS2, about the matter in a written question, his response was that the Department had never assessed the cost of a direct rail line or ways to reduce journey times between Leigh and HS2. To spell out what that means, it will take longer for my residents in one area of my constituency to connect to HS2 than it will for them to travel from that area into Birmingham, which is not right.

I make this case not just because of the need for transport and infrastructure, which I do not believe would instantly solve all our problems, but because an improved transport infrastructure would directly assist a number of concerns unique to Leigh, such as the social mobility problem, the ongoing skills shortage and the under-investment in local businesses. We therefore need from the Government an assurance of investment, and an assurance that any investments in the local transport infrastructure via regional bodies such as Transport for the North and Transport for Greater Manchester are based on a published assessment of local economic needs.

In conclusion, this debate is not just about transport links in the north, but about the entire regional economy. I welcome this Government's commitment to the northern powerhouse project, but it cannot succeed unless every town in the north is connected and offered the same opportunities as the inner cities. We cannot expect the regional economy to boom when so many towns are being held back. Put quite simply, the north will succeed when our northern towns succeed. I hope this debate will highlight the importance of transport connectivity to our local economies and ensure that towns such as Leigh receive their fair share of investment in the future.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing)**: Order. I am afraid that I have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

9.16 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I pay tribute to and thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing this matter to the House, and I back up many of the words used by the hon. Member for Leigh (Jo Platt), who said this debate is about the regional economy, not simply about transport infrastructure.

Without a doubt, the United Kingdom is rare in that as a developed larger country we are essentially unipolar. The fact that our capital is more than seven times bigger than our second biggest city hints at the inequality that exists across the whole of this country. The fact that only two of the regions or nations of the United Kingdom make a positive GDP contribution to our overall economy demonstrates that regional inequality is not just morally wrong, but a colossal waste of space and talent.

[Tim Farron]

I want to make the few minutes available to me count by drawing attention to the disparity in the debate even on the development of northern transport. The centrepiece, as it were, of the northern powerhouse is HS2. I support it, but it is clearly a southerner's concept of what is good for the north: the idea is that all we need for fulfilment is to get to London just a little bit quicker. The fact is that east-west interconnectivity all the way up and down the north of England—the A69 right the way down to the M60, the A66 and A65, and all points in between, as well as the rail networks—is even more important, dare I say it, than the north-south link.

It is important that we, as northerners, stick together and have northern solidarity, but I am still bound to say that people from the north of the north and, even more, from the rural parts of the north of the north find themselves even further down the list of priorities. When the Chancellor recently met people to discuss the northern powerhouse, whom did he meet? He met the Mayors of Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Teesside, not representatives of the vast majority of people in the north of England who live in more rural communities elsewhere.

Transport for the North's glossy recent publication gives three and a half lines to the tourism economy of Cumbria, which is of course Britain's second biggest destination after the city we are in now. One of the consequences of the lack of prioritisation of Cumbria in particular has been the betrayal of our community with the cancellation of the planned electrification of the Lakes line. The fact that we now have downsized and reduced quality rolling stock—30-year-old Thames Valley rejects—means that the bi-mode trains will be a Heath Robinson affair. As the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) has pointed out, the Furness line, like the Lakes line, has poorer quality rolling stock and many delayed and cancelled trains. I ask the Minister to focus on bringing back the electrification of the Lakes line, which was promised and then withdrawn.

In the few seconds I have left, I draw attention to the need to provide a northern relief road—the development road that would unlock the housing potential of the industrial estate to the north-east of Kendal. We must bear in mind how vital it is to have rural bus services that work and serve every part of our community. In our great county of Cumbria, two years on since Storm Desmond, there are still bridges, such as that in Burneside, yet to be put back. The £25 million bid that we put in for those bridges to be restored was turned down by the Government.

If you back Cumbria, you back a winner. It was given world heritage site status just a few months ago. Investment in the north and in our part of the north will build this country up and give a massive return on that investment.

9.20 pm

**Laura Pidcock** (North West Durham) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing this debate, and not least for the opportunity to be surrounded by so many northerners.

The 1980s Thatcherite initiative of bus deregulation and privatisation has been an unmitigated disaster for my constituents in North West Durham. The model

introduced competition between private companies because it was wrongly thought that it would increase the range and regularity of services, but it has done the absolute opposite. Privatisation, taken alongside the 30%-plus bus funding cuts to my local authority and the overall 18% transport funding cut in the region, means that my constituents are paying more than people in other areas of the country, waiting longer and enduring ridiculous travel times just to get a few miles down the road.

Added to that, Consett has been ill-served by central Government transport cuts and the neglect of the region. It is one of the largest towns in Britain without a train station and it has inadequate road infrastructure, much of which is made up of single carriageways in dire need of repair.

The situation with the buses is the most pressing. I never thought I would get so obsessed with buses! One constituent who lives in Stanley Crook got a job in Consett, which is only 13 miles away, but it would take him more than 2 hours and 30 minutes to get there by public transport. Down here, I can get to work for £3 return. I have never had to run for a bus or wait for long. One of my team who works in my Consett office has to pay £6.20 to get there from Durham. He has to pay more than double what I have to pay to get to his place of work. It costs many people in my constituency more than £7 a day to get to Newcastle.

Many of my constituents in Weardale could get to London quicker than they can get to their nearest cities. One bus in Weardale operates to Newcastle on a Tuesday, but if they miss the return bus, they have to wait three days for another return to the dale. In many parts of my constituency, people cannot get a bus after 8 pm, on a Sunday or on a bank holiday Monday. Many older people have to either struggle up hills with their shopping or use taxis, rendering their bus pass meaningless.

**Ian Mearns:** I wonder whether the Minister would be surprised to learn that the same operators who operate in my hon. Friend's constituency and mine make twice as much profit there as they do in London, yet we are not allowed to regulate our buses.

**Laura Pidcock:** We are not asking for much more than what London already has. I agree with my hon. Friend.

I do not want to politically sanitise this debate. I think that transport and public transport are immensely political. I also think that it is a class issue, because the people who use the services in my constituency are not the type of people who are hiding away millions in offshore trusts. They are hard-working people, many of them on the minimum wage, who have to spend hundreds of hours travelling to their place of work or study, instead of on leisure time, and who pay proportionately so much more for the pleasure.

There is no such thing as the northern powerhouse; it is a fallacy constructed by this Government to divert people's attention away from the grave inequalities of our region's funding. There will be no resurgence of the north-east's post-industrial towns, including those in my constituency, if it is not backed up by funding and a shift in the priorities of the Government about what my constituents should expect from the service. Do the Government think that we are somehow second-class citizens and that because we are used to poor transport

and to not being connected, we can just be ignored? We always seem to be second; we always seem to have the oldest stock; we always seem to get less than other parts of the region.

Local authorities must be able to have an area-based strategy that sets out the routes, prices and frequency of buses so that local people are not at the mercy of the profits of private companies who will only fund the most profitable routes. How can the Government justify the £1,943 a person, which other Members have mentioned, being spent in London on current or planned projects compared with just £222 in the north-east? How can that possibly be justified? The people of Weardale and Consett, and all the other areas in my constituency, deserve much better.

9.25 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): We should, of course, reduce emissions and we should therefore encourage people to use public transport wherever they can. Most mornings, however, many of my constituents taking the train from Dewsbury or Mirfield to Leeds, Manchester or Huddersfield will find themselves running late, usually without a seat, and feeling frustrated and annoyed. They are, inevitably, paying over the odds for the privilege. I am sure other Members on the Opposition Benches could join me in offering stories from our constituents who try to get to work on trains nearly as old as me—and I am 42!—which are overcrowded and late-running Pacer trains. This is causing misery for commuters across the north. The number of Conservative MPs remaining in the Chamber this evening is indicative of the fact that it is no secret the north has been let down by the Government.

Our country is one of the most over-centralised in Europe. The London-centric view of Britain dominates at every level: in our politics, in our media and in most things we do. That is not just bad for the north, but for the entire country and the economy. Without jobs, businesses and opportunities for people in the north, the Government's northern powerhouse is nothing more than a slogan. As we saw over the summer, the Government are still pouring money into London at the expense of northern communities just like mine. This cannot and must not carry on.

Spending on transport in Yorkshire will be roughly £250 a head from 2016-17 onwards, compared with almost £2,000 a head in London. Is it any wonder that northerners are sick of this Government, especially as the population of the north is twice that of London? I find it difficult to articulate just how angry I was in the summer when the Secretary of State for Transport was somehow able to find £30 billion for Crossrail 2 in London, despite downgrading plans for Crossrail for the north just the week before. But do you know what? It is not simply the lack of investment and interest in the north that upsets me about the Government; it is their lack of ambition for towns and constituencies just like mine. I will work with anybody who can bring the same level of jobs, growth, opportunities and investment to the north that we have seen in London and the south-east, so why on earth will the Government not do exactly that? Crossrail for the north could bring in £100 billion to the northern economy and upward of 850,000 jobs. After years of chronic underfunding in the north, if the Government find themselves in a situation where only one scheme can progress, surely it needs to be Crossrail for the north?

Northern MPs on all sides of the House need to stand up and say clearly that, at least just this once, the Government must not leave our northern communities at the back of the queue. The Government should be speaking to our Mayors, our fantastic councillors and council leaders, and to proud northern communities like mine. We sit here 200 miles away in Westminster talking about what is best for the north. We have a so-called "Minister for the Northern Powerhouse" whose office is in SW1. I say to the Government that we can have all the grand gestures and fancy slogans in the world, but without the real and honest political will on the Government Benches, as well as on our side, northerners will carry on being let down. Our side of the House has always proudly stood up for the north, and we are ready and waiting to reboot the northern economy. So please, Minister, no more broken promises from this Government. It is beyond time that the north got moving. It is time for our proud northern towns, cities and villages to come to life.

9.28 pm

**Tony Lloyd** (Rochdale) (Lab): The Minister will have heard throughout the debate, not just from my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), the frustration of the people in the north at the lack of ambition shown by the Government, and even successive Governments, in terms of the need for better quality transport. If the north was able to close the productivity gap with London and the south-east, it would dramatically change the country's economic prospects. The Minister has to go back to his Department and say that its pre-occupation with London and the south-east does no service to the people of this country, including those in London and the south-east.

At the end of the day, the issue of transport is not about individual schemes, important though some of them are, but about connectivity and building networks that can make a difference. If we can build networks across the north that allow our people to get in and out of work and to the outside world, we will transform the economy of the nation. Every Labour Member tonight has talked about the need for local connectivity. In Rochdale, people struggle to get on the local trains in the morning and again in the evenings. That is not good enough in 21st-century Britain.

It is not good enough that people cannot easily get to an international airport just down the road. I would like to say a few words about Manchester airport. When the new service from Manchester to Beijing opened, the results were dramatic. It has been suggested that we will see an extra 850 jobs as a result. We have seen a doubling of the amount of spending by Chinese tourists in the north of England—in places such as the Lake District and Liverpool, as well as Manchester—and exports to China have shot up dramatically, effectively by a quarter. That is clear evidence that when we invest in, and utilise the capacity of, the north of England, we can transform what the north is about. We need to transform the north. We need the Department for Transport to drop its assumption that the national interest is equivalent to the interests of London and the south-east—it is not; the national interest is consistent with development in the north.

Greater Manchester needs connectivity. The constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Jo Platt) need it to get to work, to places of entertainment—wherever

[Tony Lloyd]

they need to get to—just as much as my constituents do at the other end of Greater Manchester. Greater Manchester put to the Government a plan for a second transport fund consistent with the one some years ago that would have allowed us to transform the infrastructure of Greater Manchester and change how people travel across the conurbation, and in a way consistent with what we would expect to see in other major European cities. We are told, however, that the Government are not interested in that scheme.

It is that lack of ambition that Ministers must challenge. The Minister must go back to the Department and say, “Stop thinking that Britain is only London and the south-east. Think about the whole nation and about investment across the piece”. Whether it is the north-east, Yorkshire and Humberside, or the north-west, from Carlisle down to Cheshire, our region matters. Our region can stop the overheating of the economy in one city. It can change the profile of modern Britain in a way consistent with the national interest and the interests of people in London and the south.

9.32 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing forward this debate.

When I was told that I was scheduled to wind up in this debate, entitled “Transport in the North”, for the Scottish National party, I immediately started researching the train timetables to Aberdeen, Wick, Thurso and beyond, and I leapt for my ferry timetable to Orkney and Shetland—not because I suddenly felt the need to run away, but because my understanding of the “north” differs from that of most of tonight’s speakers. That said, Scotland experiences many of the same issues as the north of England, and I can empathise with most who have spoken tonight.

I worked in Darlington for seven years, and my friends and colleagues often complained that investment was far greater down south. I heard the same complaints when I worked in Leeds and Birmingham. When I worked in Shoreham-by-Sea and stayed in Hove, the complaints there were that London pulled in all the money. There is a disproportionate amount of investment in infrastructure in general and transport in particular in the south, and specifically London.

Given that Brexit is to hit parts of Scotland worst, we must diminish the harm that southern infrastructure does to Scottish economies. Aberdeen could be the city worst hit by falling economic output due to a hard Brexit. A report last week from the centre for cities and the centre for economic performance at the London School of Economics said that all cities would see a fall in output owing to increasing trade costs, and Aberdeen and Edinburgh were ranked among the 10 most affected cities.

Connecting HS2 to Scotland must be a priority. Extending high-speed rail to include Scotland would provide an opportunity to create a more successful country through increasing sustainable economic growth, make Scotland an even more attractive place to do business and provide more and better employment opportunities for people. If HS2 stops at Leeds and Manchester,

Scotland will lose out, as it will be relatively further away from London and the other great English cities. The SNP manifesto of 2017 stated:

“Connecting Scotland to HS2 must be a priority, with construction beginning in Scotland as well as England, and a high speed connection between Glasgow, Edinburgh and the north of England as part of any high-speed rail network.”

However, HS2 is not just about physical build; it can and should build skills and capability, and provide jobs for a generation. There is no reason why those jobs cannot be provided throughout the United Kingdom. Scotland is already positioning itself as a hub for high-speed rail expertise, and Heriot-Watt University’s high-speed rail centre of excellence puts Scotland on the map as a place for specialist high-speed rail knowledge. The shadow Chancellor has expressed Labour’s support for the extension of HS2 to Scotland. If the Scottish Tory MPs are, as they say, a voice for Scotland and therefore support that extension, a majority in the House is favour of it. The question for Scotland’s Tories now is whether they will back growing cross-party calls, or stay silent and sell Scotland out once again.

Of course, moving people from north to south and from south to north is not enough. We must also move from east to west and from west and east, and enable our large cities to be fed by their suburbs. HS2 is not the be-all and end-all. Scotland has the option to look towards our Nordic neighbours and build better links to northern Europe, but we value our relationship with the rest of the United Kingdom—when it is on an even footing. Today the First Minister of Scotland, addressing the North East England Chamber of Commerce, said:

“I am determined for us to take the necessary steps to secure Scotland’s future and improve our connectivity with England...This...could have significant benefits for people and businesses on both sides of the border.”

As we in Scotland try to improve our rail links to England, the UK Government are not helping. I am deeply disappointed by their decision to cut Scotland’s share of Network Rail funding. The most recent offer of grant funding from the Treasury for Network Rail is not consistent with the funding arrangements introduced at the point of devolution, offering a 10.43% rather than an 11.17% share. That is about £600 million short of the early estimates from the rail industry of what would be required to renew the network and meet projected demands for rail use.

In 2016, the UK and Scottish Governments jointly commissioned work to identify options for improvement on the east and west coast rail corridors, with a focus on delivering three-hour journeys between Scotland and London. According to the First Minister,

“these studies will confirm we will be able to reduce the journey time between Edinburgh and Newcastle by a third, down to only one hour, and also reduce journey times between Glasgow and Edinburgh and Carlisle.”

The Scottish Government built the Borders Railway, which is the longest new line built in the UK for over a century, and they would welcome a discussion about extending it to Carlisle.

If the Government continue to fund transport disproportionately, they will continue to feed the beast that has created the disparity that we all seek to end. As Scotland builds to the south the UK Government must build in the north, so that we can have the true connectivity that will bring benefit to all of us.

9.38 pm

**Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I welcome the debate, and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on initiating it.

This issue goes to the heart of the current political debate about the fairness and justice of our economic system, and the equity of the way in which our resources are distributed. I know that the Secretary of State will be busy, but I am sure that the people of the north would be interested to learn what the Minister's boss considered to be more important and deserving of his personal attention tonight.

If the north of England were a stand-alone nation, it would be among the 10 biggest economies in Europe. It has a population of 16 million, more than a million businesses, and exports worth more than £50 billion. The north makes an enormous contribution to the success and prosperity of the UK, but poor transport infrastructure constrains its potential. The divide in north-south transport spending is scandalous, unsustainable, and profoundly damaging. In the last five years, the Government spent £21.5 billion across the north, compared with more than £30 billion spent in London alone, although the north has nearly twice the population of our capital.

Rail connectivity between the city regions of the north of England is the key issue in this debate, and the Northern and TransPennine rail operations are catalysts for delivering the economic improvements. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North said, it is scandalous that, under today's rail infrastructure, travelling from London to Paris takes an hour less than travelling west-east from Liverpool to Hull.

When the franchises were awarded in December 2015, the then Transport Secretary said:

"Crucially, in a key step towards full devolution, these contracts will be managed in Leeds by a joint team from the Department for Transport and Rail North, which represents the region's 29 local transport authorities."—[*Official Report*, 9 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 369WS.]

The current Secretary of State said in August this year:

"I want the North to take control"

of its transport. He also said that, rather than delivering the investment the Conservatives had promised, he would instead devolve power, so the north could "take control" and

"build the transport links the North needs to thrive".

But the promise of powers have, like the promise of investment, not materialised. Transport for the North will only be a "statutory influencer"—whatever on earth that could be—only having the right to prepare a strategy and provide the Secretary of State with advice. Transport for the North will not be able to borrow money or fund investment like Transport for London. So will the Minister explain how the north can "take control" when the Department for Transport has the power of veto over it? Former Conservative Minister Lord O'Neill recently said that the north cannot take ownership without power. This is the latest insult to the north, and it is another betrayal.

Can the Minister confirm whether 40 civil servants are working within his Department on northern transport policy? If so, what is the relationship between those civil servants and Transport for the North? In short, who is working for whom?

With the Tories in power, rail fares have risen at twice the rate of wages and, in a move the Conservatives would have surely planned as voters went to the ballot box, the electrification projects were delayed by years within weeks of the election, before eventually being cancelled within weeks of the 2017 election.

Adding insult to injury, the Transport Secretary claims that bi-mode diesel-electric trains running on electrified track deliver the same benefits as electrification, and that it does not matter how trains are powered and passengers will be spared unsightly electric wires. May I tell the Minister that passengers in the south do not seem to mind them? What evidence does the Minister have to substantiate these claims? Network Rail and his own Department agree that, running on diesel, 30% more CO<sub>2</sub> is emitted, maintenance is increased by a third, fuel costs rocket by a quarter and journeys are slower.

Not so long ago we had the Northern hub; now we have Northern Powerhouse Rail. Is the Minister able to give the House a breakdown of where the pledged £1 billion will be spent, and can he confirm that he supports Transport for the North's call for the realignment of the HS2 route on the approach to Manchester Piccadilly?

Labour will deliver full devolution of transport to the north of England and provide a better deal for the region, which is why we have made a commitment of at least £10 billion to deliver "Crossrail for the north", a series of major rail improvements across existing west-east links in the north of England. We will reverse decades of under-investment in northern transport infrastructure that has undermined the economic potential of the north of England and help deliver 850,000 new jobs by 2050. Labour will work alongside its Mayors in Manchester and Liverpool, as well as local authorities across the north, to bring forward the resources needed to help unlock the £97 billion of economic potential in the north.

In contrast, the Government's approach to rail investment has been promises, postponements and cancellations. The rail industry has to have confidence if it is to invest; sadly, the feast and famine history of rail programmes does not give the industry the confidence it needs. The Conservative party claims to be the champion of industry and enterprise. In practice, its actions in government undermine those objectives at every turn.

Labour is determined to put an end to the buses crisis brought about by this Government. More than 20% of all journeys by public transport are taken by bus, and buses are vital for tackling social exclusion and poverty, yet bus services in the north have faced a sustained attack since 2010, with funding in the north-east, the north-west and Yorkshire and the Humber slashed by 22%, 23% and 37% respectively. As a consequence, bus travel is at its lowest level for a decade, while fares have risen 13% above inflation.

For some, a bus service connects them to their job or to their doctor, and its removal can be devastating for people who have no other options. Labour would end the bus crisis by extending the powers to regulate buses across the country, by overturning the senseless ban on

[Andy McDonald]

new municipal bus companies, by allowing cuts to services to be reversed and by putting communities rather than commercial operators in charge of essential public transport.

Sadly, the Conservatives have failed to provide sufficient investment in cycling or walking over the last seven years. This year's long-awaited cycling and walking investment strategy offered almost no investment and no meaningful policies or targets. Only £6 per head was spent on cycling across England over 2016-17. Cycling UK estimates that this investment is heavily weighted towards London, with only £316 per head over the five-year period of April 2016 to 2021 going towards both cycling and walking, working out at £1.38 per person in England outside London.

Northern MPs have rightly spoken of the need for greater transport infrastructure investment in the north of England, but we do not underplay or undervalue the vital role played by our capital city. I know that the Minister for rail, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard)—who is not with us this evening—prefers to focus on outcomes rather than per capita spending, and while it is right to value London as an engine room of the UK economy, the north is a sleeping giant ready to be raised from its slumbers. That cannot happen unless the north receives the fair funding settlement it deserves in order to fulfil its economic potential.

Transport is not an end in itself; it is a means—an enabler of social and economic growth. Constraining transport constrains human potential, and it is about time the true potential of the north was unleashed.

9.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** I should like to congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate on transport in the north, which has, by and large, been well informed, energetic and not overly partisan. My colleagues and I know that securing transport improvements is crucial for her constituents, as it is for all of us. In fact, from either side of the House, both this evening's debate and the wider debate on this issue in recent weeks demonstrate how broad the recognition now is that good transport really matters to our economic lifeblood. That might sound obvious—it is a point that has been made frequently this evening—but it is a fact that has been overlooked by successive Governments until now. It has resulted in a legacy of under-investment, as many colleagues have pointed out. This Government are putting that right.

Other Members have pointed out that the north of England is already a very important economic actor in our national life. It is not a sleeping giant. It is a lively, active and energetic giant. With a population of 15 million, more than 1 million businesses and exports upwards of £50 billion, the north of England makes a huge contribution to the success and prosperity of the UK. If the north were a country, it would be among the 10 biggest economies in Europe, but growth in that economy has been inhibited by poor transport, as has been said many times this evening. Without significant investment in modern, efficient, reliable connections, the vast economic potential of the north cannot be realised. That is why the Government are spending £13 billion on improving northern transport.

Many Opposition Members and, indeed, some Conservative Members behind me claimed today that we spend more in the south than in the north. However, the figures they have used, which rely on a particular IPPR report, are misleading and certainly do not represent the true picture of investment. The first point is that, of the project pipeline that was used, 60% cannot be properly geographically allocated. The second point is that the figures completely understate the role that London has not as a southern city, but as the gateway for many tourists and other visitors to this country. I will give one example: the number of rail passengers at peak morning times in London is 18 times that in Manchester, which is the busiest city in the north. The figures are misleading and it is important to put that on the record.

**Andy McDonald:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jesse Norman:** I have so many points to make that I have to proceed; I have only nine minutes left.

Promoting that misinformation is not helpful to our public debate. It misinforms the travelling public and risks undermining confidence in the north when it should be robust. That is frustrating for the Government when we are working so hard to overcome decades of under-investment in the north. We are investing in road and rail, in near-term projects and in ones that will take years to complete. We want to transform journeys for passengers and drivers and to create the capacity that the north needs to flourish.

However, we are not just investing; we are devolving power to the north to ensure that future investment is put to the best possible use. I remind the House that Transport for the North has not yet been established, because the process is complex and involves 56 authorities. It will be the first statutory sub-national transport body to be established. Its structure is well understood, and Transport for the North is comfortable with it. There is no comparison with Transport for London, which is an institution of much greater standing and longevity. Transport for the North will start strongly—hopefully by the end of this year—as a statutory body and will grow from there.

Perhaps the clearest statement of this Government's commitment to the north is the fact we are now building HS2—the first new north-south railway in this country for over a century. It is a huge undertaking, but we are backing this vital project, because it is crucial to the future economy of the north. With high-speed rail stations in Manchester, Leeds, Crewe and Sheffield, and high-speed trains serving many other destinations, the north will be the principal beneficiary of HS2. It will open in 2026 and up to 18 trains will be running each hour by 2033, carrying up to 1,100 passengers each and releasing significant new capacity on the existing railways.

However, we know that better connectivity within the north is just as vital as better links to the rest of the country, a point which has been well made this evening. That is why we are also committed to northern powerhouse rail, which will provide fast rail connections between the major cities of the north. Transport for the North will develop proposals for the scheme, backed by £60 million of Government funding as a capital investment in the scheme plus £60 million—£10 million a year—of revenue funding. We are working with Transport for the North to strengthen the business case for the project, and the

Government have already committed £300 million to integrate the Northern Powerhouse Rail project with HS2, making it easier and less disruptive to build that railway in the future.

HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail will provide the future capacity and connectivity that the north needs to grow and flourish, but it is important to say that we are also investing in nearer-term improvements. Better rail journeys through the new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises will deliver more than 500 brand-new train carriages, with room for 40,000 more passengers and 2,000 extra services a week. All trains on the Northern and TransPennine route will be brand-new or refurbished by 2020 and, crucially, the Pacer trains will be gone.

We are also making near-term infrastructure improvements: the great north rail project has already seen the fastest journey between Liverpool and Manchester cut by 15 minutes; Manchester Victoria has been upgraded; new platforms have been added at key stations; and there are new direct services between Manchester airport and Glasgow. We are also well on the way to upgrading Liverpool Lime Street and other key routes in the region. And we will soon be marking the completion of the Ordsall chord, which will provide new and direct links to Manchester airport from across the region, as the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) rightly highlighted.

We are also working with Network Rail to develop options for major upgrades between Manchester, Leeds and York to deliver more seats and faster journeys. As the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) will know, we are also supporting the Tyne and Wear Metro system with £317 million for its reinvigoration and renewal programme and £230 million towards its running costs—I was pleased to meet the senior team about its investment bid for the refurbishment of rolling stock.

With so much investment going in, we also want to make it easier for people to use the railways in the north, which is why we have committed £150 million to the roll-out of smart ticketing across the north. Smart ticketing will allow people to use their mobile phones and contactless and smart cards on trains, trams and buses.

Although we have not heard much about it in this debate, and although rail investment is crucial, the Government are acutely aware that most journeys are made by road, so we are spending almost £3 billion to make journeys faster and more reliable on the north's roads and motorways. We are building smart motorways and new roads, and we are improving the ones we already have. We are delivering extra lanes, improvements to problem junctions, new junctions to ease traffic jams, bypasses and simple schemes to make journeys smoother.

The M62 between Leeds and Manchester is being upgraded to a four-lane smart highway. The A556 from Knutsford to Bowden has been expanded to a dual carriageway, helping the more than 50,000 vehicles a day that use that crucial route. The new Mersey Gateway crossing has recently opened, greatly improving connectivity in the area. Work is under way on the A6 Manchester Airport relief road, which will improve access to the airport and relieve congestion in south-east Manchester.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and his opposite number, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who is no longer in his seat,

will be delighted that the A160/A180 port of Immingham improvements were completed in June, upgrading the gateway to one of the UK's busiest ports to full dual carriageway standard.

I might also tell the hon. Member for Scunthorpe, who is not here—[HON. MEMBERS: "He is here."] I am so sorry. I apologise to him. He has moved from his seat. I am delighted to address him directly through you, Mr Speaker. He seems to have forgotten that we wrote off £150 million of debt on the Humber bridge only a few years ago, thus lowering the cost of tolls and improving usage.

By the end of 2017 we will have removed the last remaining section of non-motorway on the strategic M1/A1 route between London and Newcastle. I could go on, but I will not. Our airports—Newcastle, Leeds, Bradford and Manchester—are all succeeding. I am delighted that all that, and more, is being done by this Government.

9.58 pm

**Diana Johnson:** We had an excellent debate until the last 10 minutes. We had a tour around the north of England. We went to Cumbria, Hull, Cleethorpes and Durham, and we heard a lot about the A1, the A15, the A63 and even A roads that go through farmyards. We heard about ports and regional airports. As northern MPs, across parties, we are all ambitious for our region, and we want regional inequalities to be addressed by fair funding. We will not be going away. We will be holding this Government to account.

I am disappointed with the Minister's response, because I think he read out a pre-prepared speech. He did not listen to what people were saying. With the greatest of respect, and as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) said, it is typical of a southern Transport Minister to think that the problems of the north can be dealt with by HS2.

The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), talked about the 120 days he has been waiting for a response from the Department to a letter signed by 10 MPs. The Department managed to get itself working very quickly this evening, because it has already been on the phone to *The Yorkshire Post* to complain that the newspaper has apparently put about the idea that the Secretary of State has snubbed this debate. It is important to note that this was a national issue; it was not about local transport. It is about a national issue and the Secretary of State's comments over the summer.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered transport in the North.

## Business without Debate

### COMMITTEES

**Mr Speaker:** With the leave of the House, we will take motions 2 to 7 together.

*Ordered,*

### CONSOLIDATION, &C., BILLS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

That James Cleverly, Mims Davies, Chris Elmore, Patrick Grady, Eddie Hughes, Imran Hussain, Stephen Kerr, Conor McGinn, Amanda Milling, Grahame Morris, Melanie Onn and Julian Sturdy be members of the Joint Committee on Consolidation, &c., Bills.

## REGULATORY REFORM

That Bim Afolami, Andrew Bridgen, Douglas Chapman, Julie Elliott, Kirstene Hair, Simon Hoare, Graham P Jones, Helen Jones, Mr Kevan Jones, Conor McGinn, Stephen McPartland, Mark Menzies, Jeremy Quin and Karl Turner be members of the Regulatory Reform Committee.

## ADMINISTRATION

That Patrick Grady be a member of the Administration Committee.

## EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

That Geraint Davies be a member of the European Scrutiny Committee.

## HUMAN RIGHTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

That Joanna Cherry be a member of the Joint Committee on Human Rights.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

That Jared O'Mara be discharged from the Women and Equalities Committee.—(*Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.*)

## LIAISON COMMITTEE: MEMBERSHIP

*Ordered,*

That, with effect for the current Parliament, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 121 (Nomination of select committees), the chair for the time being of each of the following select committees shall be a member of the Liaison Committee:

Administration; Backbench Business; Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Communities and Local Government; Defence; Digital, Culture, Media and Sport; Education; Environmental Audit; Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; European Scrutiny; Exiting the European Union; Finance; Foreign Affairs; Health; Home Affairs; Joint Committee on Human Rights (the chair being a Member of this House); International Development; International Trade; Justice; Northern Ireland Affairs; Petitions; Privileges (the Chair not being the Chair of the Committee on Standards); Procedure; Public Accounts; Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs; Regulatory Reform; Science and Technology; Scottish Affairs; Selection; Standards; Statutory Instruments; Transport; Treasury; Welsh Affairs; Women and Equalities; and Work and Pensions.—(*Nigel Adams.*)

## Abortion Act 1967: 50th Anniversary

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Nigel Adams.*)

10 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Fifty years ago, the noble Lord Steel and thousands of brave campaigners brought about a momentous change in women's reproductive rights. It is hard to overstate the benefits that their campaign brought to women. Abortion has gone from being a leading cause of maternal mortality, shockingly responsible for 14% of maternal deaths—a fact that organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children do not address when they call for the abolition of the 1967 Act—to being the most common medical or surgical procedure in the UK, one that a third of women will have had by the time they reach 45. We used to be a country where an estimated 87,000 to 100,000 illegal abortions took place every year and where unwanted pregnancies changed the lives of desperate women. Now, 200,000 women a year can access safe, free and legal services on the NHS.

The 1967 Act was a landmark piece of legislation. For a time, it made Britain one of the world leaders in reproductive rights, when this Parliament introduced a humane piece of law. I am disappointed that no Minister from the Department of Health or the Government Equalities Office has attended any of the events marking the enactment of this piece of legislation. I am also disappointed that Ministers have chosen to award funding raised from the tampon tax to Life, which argues for restricting women's choices on reproductive rights, when so many wonderful charities could have benefited and used the money to empower women and support their choices.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. When I debated with the pro-life charity Life on the radio recently, I was told that if a woman it was helping went on to decide to have a termination, it would withdraw support, including housing, from that woman. Does she agree that that is incredibly concerning?

**Diana Johnson:** Yes, that is incredibly concerning and I think it is a really bad decision of the Government to award money from the tampon tax to that organisation.

As this House tonight rightly marks the milestone of the Abortion Act, we should also reflect on whether the Act is still fit for purpose. The Abortion Act was never intended to be the end of the campaign for women's reproductive rights. That point was put succinctly by the late Madeleine Simms, a former campaigner at the Abortion Law Reform Association and one of the architects of the original law. She said:

“The 1967 Abortion Act was a half-way house. It handed the abortion decision to the medical profession. The next stage is to hand this very personal decision to the woman herself.”

I want to turn to why the abortion law needs reforming. Britain's abortion laws are governed not just by that 50-year-old Act, but by the 88-year-old Infant Life (Preservation) Act 1929 and the 156-year-old Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Taken together, this is the oldest legal framework for any healthcare procedure in the UK. It is a framework that, astonishingly, still treats

the act of abortion as inherently criminal and punishable by life imprisonment. As I have mentioned, one third of women, and the healthcare professionals who support them, are stigmatised by these laws. As Madeleine Simms highlighted, the 1967 Act did not give women authority over their own abortions; it merely handed that authority to the medical profession, subject to the consent of two doctors. No other medical procedure requires the sign-off of two doctors, and nor does that requirement exist in most other countries in which abortion is legal.

While other healthcare areas have moved towards more patient-centred provision, with a better doctor-patient relationship, the provisions of the 1967 Act are, despite the best efforts of healthcare professionals, holding back similar progress in reproductive healthcare. Furthermore, as Professor Lesley Regan of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists said:

“No other medical procedure in the UK is so out of step with clinical and technological developments”.

Since 2014, the majority of abortions in England and Wales have been carried out medically, using pills. The 1967 Act was not designed with medical abortions in mind; it was passed when the overwhelming majority of abortions were carried out through surgical techniques.

I regret the fact that, in the 50 years since the Abortion Act was passed, Parliament has mostly shied away from debating issues such as those I have just set out. In March, the House of Commons heard the First Reading of my ten-minute rule Bill on the decriminalisation of abortion in England and Wales. In the 50 years before I introduced the Bill, previous MPs had introduced 11 Bills to amend our abortion laws—seven were private Members’ Bills and four were, like mine, ten-minute rule Bills. All 11 attempted to restrict abortion in some way; not a single one was about improving provision or better supporting women. It seems peculiar that for a procedure so common—one that affects a third of women—the overwhelming parliamentary focus has been on ways to restrict the practice. Had this procedure affected a third of men, it is hard to imagine that we would have debated it in the same way.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does she agree that parliamentary opinion on this matter is massively out of step with public opinion? The vast majority of people in this country favour safe and legal abortion.

**Diana Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, although the House did give my ten-minute rule Bill to decriminalise abortion its First Reading. It will be interesting to see the result if it is debated again in the new Parliament.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I am very impressed by the hon. Lady, as she knows because I spoke to her before the debate to ask to intervene. She knows my opinion on these matters. I understand that she is going to bring some things forward, which would be a help, but at the same time we are meant to believe that abortion is somehow an expression of women’s rights, but, on the contrary, some of us believe that it is so often the means by which vulnerable young women are themselves destroyed by the sorrow it can naturally engender. Even when abortion itself does not cause the destruction of women, their mistreatment by the industry that provides abortion daily in this country clearly can.

**Diana Johnson:** Clearly, 50 years ago Parliament took the view that it was going to allow abortions to take place in certain circumstances. It is right and proper that there is strict regulation around abortion. When I discussed decriminalisation earlier in the year, I talked about decriminalising, not deregulating. All providers have to provide the highest-quality care to women.

Successive British Governments have failed to act to improve abortion provision. They have sometimes hidden behind the false pretext that issues of provision are issues of conscience, thereby setting the issue aside as too difficult to tackle. In the months before and since I introduced my ten-minute rule Bill, yet more compelling evidence has demonstrated the need for long overdue changes to our abortion laws. Women, including desperate victims of domestic abuse, are increasingly ill-served by our current laws and criminalised for buying abortion pills online.

Waiting times for abortion services appear to be on the rise. Recently, figures obtained by investigative journalists at “The Debrief” showed that in 76% of the clinical commissioning groups and NHS trusts they surveyed, average abortion waiting times in 2016 were higher than they were in 2013. The Family Planning Association tells women that they should have to wait only 10 working days for an abortion, but a quarter of CCGs and trusts have average waiting times longer than that. In my local CCG in Hull, waiting times have jumped 6.7 days in just a year—one of the highest jumps identified.

The number of abortion pills seized by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency posted to addresses in Britain has risen seventy-fivefold, from just five in 2013 to 375 in 2016. From November 2016 to February 2017, Women on Web, an international organisation that prescribes abortion pills in countries where abortion is illegal, monitored the number of British women who sought help on its website. In the space of just four months, the number seeking help had doubled.

Those figures point to this conclusion: there is a rising, and unmet, demand for better abortion provision in this country.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Diana Johnson:** I am going to carry on, because I am conscious of time.

The personal cases of these women are often deeply moving. A recent study of Women on Web’s services, published in September, has provided unprecedented insight into the challenges that British women face in accessing abortion services. Of the women who approached its service, nearly one in five did so because of “controlling circumstances” at home—from abusive partners to intolerant families. As one woman told the service:

“I’m in a controlling relationship, he watches my every move. I’m so scared he will find out, I believe he’s trying to trap me and will hurt me. I can’t breathe. If he finds out, he wouldn’t let me go ahead, then I will be trapped forever. I cannot live my life like this.”

Another said:

“I’m never allowed to go anywhere without my husband or a member of his family escorting me. I don’t have a normal life since getting married. Abortion is against his family’s religion and I’m very worried what would happen if I was caught.”

[*Diana Johnson*]

For many women, making two trips to an abortion clinic, as is currently required, is simply not an option. A range of practical factors—the distance they live from a clinic, delays in accessing support, and childcare and work commitments—prevent them from making those trips. Yet each time these women purchase pills online, they are committing a criminal act, and because Women on Web does not prescribe pills in the UK, they are forced to turn to other providers, some of which may not be legitimate.

We are now in the position where the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Midwives, plus the noble Lord Steel all agree that the law needs to be updated, and that abortion should be decriminalised. It is now time for Parliament to act on this. Shortly, I will be publishing the text of a Bill to decriminalise abortion in England and Wales. I am currently working on the Bill with legal experts and professional healthcare organisations. The Bill will contain the same safeguards and regulations as those that I set out in March this year.

Most importantly, it will take women out of the criminal law altogether. Healthcare professionals who assist in abortions before 24 weeks' gestation will also be decriminalised, and they will receive further protections after 24 weeks. It will also allow us to make the best possible provision for the women who have early medical abortions. We need to look at the requirement to obtain two doctors' signatures. We should also ask whether the second abortion pill could not be taken at home should women wish to do so, just as it is in the United States, France, Sweden and, as announced recently, Scotland.

**Fiona Bruce:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Diana Johnson:** I will carry on, because I am conscious that the Minister has to respond.

I want to make the point that decriminalisation will not mean deregulation. The 24-week time limit will not be changed, and the conditions for accessing abortions post-24 weeks will not change either, but I do want to see stronger protection for women from non-consensual abortions—whether by assaulting pregnant women, or deceiving women into taking abortion medication.

I have a few requests for the Minister. It is time that we acknowledged that abortion provision is not a conscience issue. Access to abortion services is a core part of women's healthcare. It should be debated in a grown-up way, and Health Ministers should be held accountable for the quality of our abortion services. First, will the Department of Health look into the problems that women are facing in accessing abortions? The Department should be regularly assessing the problem of abortion waiting times. It should be looking to identify local areas where there is poor provision. The problems that extremely vulnerable women face in accessing abortion care should also be investigated.

Secondly, what concrete steps will the Government take to improve abortion provision? A court judgment in 2011 established that the Health Secretary could allow home use of the second abortion pill without the need for new legislation. In the light of that and of what has happened in Scotland, what are the Government planning to do? Furthermore, an increasing number of experts have questioned the two doctor requirement for early stage abortion. Will the Minister comment on that?

Thirdly, how will the Government respond to the calls to decriminalise abortion, supported by three professional medical bodies? Will the Government consider acting on these calls? Finally, we must also recognise the situation in a country where the Abortion Act does not apply. In Northern Ireland, abortion is highly restricted and criminal, even in cases of rape, incest or fatal foetal abnormality. The ongoing Supreme Court case raises the prospect that this may soon go beyond a devolved matter and become a broader human rights matter. What steps are the Government taking for that to be dealt with by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland?

In conclusion, the House should mark the anniversary of the Abortion Act—not just because of what we have achieved, but to look forward to what we need now. In the face of threats to women's reproductive rights at home and abroad, the answer is not to become timid and to remain defensive. The answer is to be bolder, to go beyond merely defending what we currently have, and to make a positive case for stronger rights and better women-centred provision. The '67 Act made Britain a world leader in women's reproductive rights, but it is time that we took the steps now to ensure that, once again, Britain reassumes this world-leading position.

10.16 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (*Diana Johnson*) on securing this debate to mark an historic occasion: the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Abortion Act 1967. As the hon. Lady explained, the Act was introduced as a private Member's Bill by the then hon. Member for Roxburgh, Selkirk and Peebles—now the right hon. the Lord Steel of Aikwood—and clearly defines the grounds under which an abortion may be carried out in England.

With the exception of emergencies, when it is necessary to perform an abortion to save the life of the woman, two doctors must certify that, in their opinion, which must be formed in good faith, a request for an abortion meets at least one ground set out in the Act, and they should be in agreement as to which ground this is. The hon. Lady asked whether it should remain the case that the opinions of two doctors are required. Well, as long as that remains the law—clearly it is—my emphasis, from a Minister's perspective, is on delivering the safest possible treatment for women in accordance with that law. The hon. Lady also raised some important issues regarding waiting times, which I would like to go away and reflect on. I am sure that everyone in this House agrees that no woman undertakes a termination lightly. For many, it is extremely traumatic, so it is incumbent on all of us to make that experience the least painful and least traumatic it can be, and as safe as possible. Central to being as safe as possible is that it takes place as early as possible.

**Fiona Bruce:** The Minister is talking about the requirement for two medical practitioners to give their agreement. A ComRes poll of 2,000 adults last week showed that 72% of the public think that abortions should continue to be subject to that legal requirement, because it ensures protection for women, particularly for those in an abusive relationship. It might be the opportunity they have to talk to someone in a safe environment about the pressure that they might be being put under to have an abortion.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** Central to this is that Parliament needs to be satisfied that the regime is safe for women. The law has been on the statute book for 50 years, and until Parliament decides to change that, that is the law that I will implement as safely as possible. I hear many polls quoted but, frankly, when it comes to this issue, on which people have very strong views, we need to ensure that we maintain the law with integrity.

Thanks to the dedication, hard work and expertise of the doctors and nurses working in abortion clinics, termination of pregnancy is now an extremely safe procedure. In marked contrast to some of the statistics before the Act, which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North outlined, data for 2016 show a complication rate of just one in every 630 abortions, which is substantially lower than just 10 years ago, when the rate was one in 500. The choice of early medical abortion, which is less invasive than a surgical procedure and does not involve use of anaesthetics, has helped to increase the overall percentage of abortions performed at under ten weeks gestation from 68% in 2006 to 81% in 2016. Clearly, the more we can encourage that, the better it will be for the welfare of women undertaking terminations.

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing the debate. The Minister is talking about what happens to women during the procedure and about how much care should be taken. However, does she share my concern that, as the report “Abortion and Women’s Health” from the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children highlighted last week, counselling and support for women who suffer mental distress after they have had an abortion is seriously lacking in this country?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** At the risk of being really controversial, I think there are lots of elements of counselling for women that are seriously lacking. That possibly reflects the fact that decisions about the welfare of women have generally been taken by men. It is great that there are now lots more women in this House able to influence exactly that.

**Paula Sherriff:** Does the Minister agree that it is imperative that we offer women choice in the decisions they take about their body? Will she give an undertaking this evening to investigate why the Government thought it was appropriate to award the largest sum from the tampon tax fund to an anti-choice organisation?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I understand that the hon. Lady feels strongly about this issue, and nobody can doubt her passion and commitment to women’s welfare. My understanding of the grant she referred to is that it went strictly towards the support of women who chose to go through with the birth. I am happy to look at that further. I am not entirely sure it was the largest donation, but I am happy to look into that. However, the hon. Lady is right when she says there should be genuine choice. We do not want anyone to feel that they cannot have an abortion, any more than we want them to feel that they have to have one. We really want women to be able to make informed choices and to feel empowered to have the child, if that is what they would like to do. The important thing is that we empower women. That is

the whole purpose of what we are trying to do here—to empower women and allow them to make choices that are safe for them.

Since the Act was passed, there have been regular calls from all sides of the debate for changes to the legislation, and the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North has outlined her views clearly today. As she said, this Government and previous ones have always viewed legislative change as a matter for the House to take a view on, and there are no plans to change that.

The Act was last amended in 1991 by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990. This reduced the time limit for most abortions from 28 weeks to 24 weeks. No time limit applies where there is a substantial risk that the child will suffer from a serious handicap or that the pregnancy would cause grave permanent injury to the physical or mental health of the mother or put her life at risk. So amendments are possible, and it is ultimately Parliament that decides the circumstances under which abortion can be legally undertaken. The Government will always ensure that regulation works to make that as safe as possible.

The hon. Lady outlined clearly her belief that abortion should be decriminalised, and the Government will no doubt take a view as and when she brings forward her Bill, as indeed will the rest of the House. It is true that any abortions conducted outside the grounds in the 1967 Act currently remain a criminal offence, and there is no intention for that issue to be dealt with by anything other than a free vote.

Turning to the impact of the Act in practice, it is important that we remember that, in the years before the Act, abortion was, indeed, the leading cause of maternal mortality in England and Wales. For example, the first confidential inquiry into maternal deaths in 1952, reported 153 deaths from abortion alone. The most recent confidential inquiry report found there were 81 reported deaths in 2012-14 for all direct causes of maternal mortality, such as obstetric complications, interventions and omissions. So since the Act came into force, women in Great Britain have had access to legal and safe abortion services.

**Jim Shannon:** Does that figure include those who committed suicide as a result of having an abortion and the effect it had on them?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** The figures include those who have died as a result of maternal complications. I am not aware of any figures that detail suicide. However, we need to look at the whole issue of counselling for women who are facing any kind of unwanted pregnancy.

In 2016, 98% of abortions were funded by the NHS, whereas in 2006 just 87% were NHS-funded. That shows that the NHS is providing more and more of this service. Ninety-two per cent. of abortions were carried out at under 13 weeks’ gestation, and 81% were carried out at under 10 weeks, illustrating the fact that the procedure is becoming safer. Sixty-two per cent. were medical abortions, more than double the proportion in 2006—again, a good sign of progress. This data clearly shows that improving access and choice within the existing framework can be achieved. I am sure that all hon. Members will welcome the fact that the vast majority of abortions are taking place at earlier gestation times, which is safer for women and offers increased choice of medical abortion.

*[Jackie Doyle-Price]*

On home use, abortions in England can be performed only in an NHS facility or in a place approved by the Secretary of State for Health. At present, a patient's home is not an approved place for abortion. I am aware that the Scottish Government have recently granted approval for the second stage of early medical abortion treatment to be undertaken in a patient's home in certain circumstances. As I have said repeatedly, our overriding principle is that all women who require abortion services in England should have access to high-quality and safe care. We will continue to engage with women and with stakeholders on ways to make our safe and regulated services even more effective.

A key part of an abortion service is providing information and services to enable women to make informed decisions and to support good sexual health. This includes information about, and provision of, contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections. Abortion providers should be able to supply all reversible methods of contraception—including long-acting reversible methods, which are the most effective—and offer testing for sexually transmitted infections as appropriate. Before the woman is discharged, future contraception should have been discussed and, as far as possible, the chosen

method should be initiated immediately. All women should be offered testing for chlamydia and offered a risk assessment for other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and syphilis. Provision of effective contraception is essential if we are to make progress towards our ambition to reduce unintended pregnancies in women of all ages. For women aged 24 and under, we have seen significant reductions in the abortion rate, most notably in under-18s, where the rate has reduced from 18.2 per 1,000 in 2006 to just 8.9 per 1,000 in 2016. Rates in women aged over 24 have remained stable or increased slightly. We know that we have more work to do to ensure that we see improvements across all age groups.

Over the past 50 years, there have been significant improvements in women's health, in the regulation of abortion, and in the safety of abortion. It is appropriate that we look back, take stock, and congratulate ourselves on that, and that we continue to ensure that the way in which we allow for legal abortion makes it, at all times, safe and well regulated.

*Question put and agreed to.*

10.28 pm

*House adjourned.*





## Westminster Hall

Monday 6 November 2017

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

### Mental Health Education in Schools

*[Relevant documents: First Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session 2016-17, Children and young people's mental health—the role of education, HC 849, and First Joint Special Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session 2017-19, Children and young people's mental health—the role of education: Government Response to the First Joint Report of the Education and Health Committees of Session 2016-17, HC 451]*

4.30 pm

**Catherine McKinnell** (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petition 176555 relating to mental health education in schools.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady, and to lead this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, given the importance of this issue for society as a whole and because of the frequency with which young people raise it with me whenever I visit local schools and youth organisations in Newcastle upon Tyne North. The e-petition, entitled “Make mental health education compulsory in primary and secondary schools”, has been signed by more than 103,000 people. It reads:

“Mental health education is still not part of the UK curriculum despite consistently high rates of child and adolescent mental health issues. By educating young people about mental health in schools, we can increase awareness and hope to encourage open and honest discussion among young people.”

I am pleased that many hon. Members are present today. That reflects the importance and timeliness of the debate. Many other hon. Members would like to be here but are unable to attend, and I am happy to put their concerns on the record. My hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) asked me to convey his constituents' concerns, even though he is unable to be here himself.

I congratulate the e-petition's creators—Tom King, a student mental health nurse, and Adam Shaw, the chairman of the Shaw Mind Foundation—on securing more than 100,000 signatures in the three months before the e-petition was closed just before the unexpected general election. Adam Shaw launched the e-petition as part of his charity's wider HeaducationUK campaign. He explained why he established it:

“Currently mental health is only taught as an optional component of PSHE—but this is not good enough. It needs to be compulsory. Understanding mental health is an absolute life skill, and should be just as fundamental within the school curriculum as reading and writing. There needs to be a compulsory collaboration and integration between mental health education and physical education, so that children and young people can understand that maintaining good mental health is equally vital to their wellbeing.”

The HeaducationUK website states:

“The UK national curriculum puts a lot of emphasis on teaching our children about how our bodies work, physical illnesses, and how exercise and nutrition can keep us healthy. These are

taught in mandatory subjects such as PE (physical education) and biology... Currently, mental health education is taught inconsistently in the UK, and only in secondary schools—despite 1 in 5 children experiencing a mental health difficulty before the age of 11.”

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to the mindfulness pioneers in the UK who developed the .b curriculum for secondary schools and Paws b for seven to 11-year-olds, which was developed at Bangor University? Bangor is already working on a curriculum for three to seven-year-olds. Most importantly, will she commend the work of Oxford University's mindfulness centre and the Mindfulness and Resilience in Adolescence—MYRIAD—project, which hope to prove scientifically the benefits of mindfulness for young people aged 11 to 18?

**Catherine McKinnell**: I am more than happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating those organisations. He has campaigned hard on that issue in this place for many years.

HeaducationUK continues:

“Mental health education is delivered via the non-compulsory subject PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic), or sometimes during school assembly or drama lessons. As PSHE is a non-compulsory subject, this means that not all schools teach it, and that in turn means that mental health education isn't always taught.”

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): I completely support the thrust of the hon. Lady's argument. Does she agree that, because of the lack of training for teachers in this particularly important subject, what is being applied now is really just emotional first-aid? If people are to do more, they have to have the ability to teach more. How does she see that working out?

**Catherine McKinnell**: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Teachers are not mental health professionals: they are teachers by profession. It is therefore vital that we improve not only our educational input but the training and support for teachers so they can deliver this support at an appropriate level and are able to signpost and refer issues if professional input is required. I will return to that key issue later.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Following the point made by the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), does my hon. Friend, like me, welcome the fact that one teacher in every secondary school is now going forward for mental health first-aid training? In itself, that will not deal with our young people's mental health needs, so we need a full-scale plan to train teachers and equip every young person with the skills and expertise they need to deal with their mental health and that of others.

**Catherine McKinnell**: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who is a passionate and successful campaigner on this issue.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in light of the fact that mental health challenges start when people are young, it is crucial that schools have mental health practitioners who can support young people? Teachers are not health professionals, and therefore do not have the necessary skills. They have

[*Rachael Maskell*]

numerous other pressures to focus on, so is it not crucial that we have mental health practitioners in schools?

**Catherine McKinnell:** Yes—I will come on to some of the big challenges in this area. It is one thing for us to agree on the principles and on the fact that we want a much better focus on mental health in the education system, but it is another matter to ensure we make the tools and resources available to make that a reality for every child in this country. I will expand on that later.

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Northherts Emotionalhealth in Schools Service trains teachers, parents and students, with peer mentoring, so all parts of the school team work together on mental health. It has been really quite successful, and has held conferences. Should the Government not look at examples such as that—it is funded by Hertfordshire County Council—for the future?

**Catherine McKinnell:** Indeed. I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for putting that on the record.

I pay tribute to UsActive, a Newcastle-based charity, whose representatives I met recently. It uses physical activity to promote better mental health for children and young people in my local area, and highlights the interrelated nature of physical and mental health in young people's lives. I absolutely agree with the concerns that the petition raises. We must highlight the link between our physical and mental health if we are to get the best outcomes for our children holistically and educationally.

I agree that the earlier that children and young people are educated about these issues, the better. We must properly support them throughout their childhood, help them to develop resilience so they can deal with any issues they face, prepare them for adult life, help them to develop coping mechanisms for the many challenges that life will bring, and ensure that they become well-rounded individuals capable of empathy and understanding for others, whether friends, family members or work colleagues, who will inevitably be affected by mental health issues. They should recognise that such issues are as much a part of everyday life as physical health concerns.

I am delighted that I have a local link to the creator of the e-petition through my constituent Reverend Mark Edwards, who works closely with the Shaw Mind Foundation to raise awareness about mental health. Mark recently published a book via Trigger Press about his mental health journey entitled "Life After Care: From Lost Cause to MBE". It details how he went from spending the majority of his childhood in foster care and being sectioned under the Mental Health Act 1983 to being a team vicar at St Matthew's church in Dinnington in my constituency, a volunteer first responder with the North East Ambulance Service, police chaplain to the Northumbria police and a former volunteer lifeboat crew member—all of which led to his being awarded an MBE. Mark has shared his experience because, in his own words:

"So many people's stories end in tragedy either because they suffer in silence or because they feel there is no support for them and that they are the only one suffering mental health issues."

Crucially, he wanted to share his story to illustrate that "there is always hope". Mark's story is a powerful one, and would be if it were included in any mental health education delivered in schools.

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful and important point about supporting children in care and meeting their mental health needs. She served with me on the Select Committee on Education when we did an important report more than a year ago about the mental health needs of young people in care. Does she agree that that is an important part of what we are debating?

**Catherine McKinnell:** Absolutely. The hon. Lady is right that the Select Committees on Health and on Education undertook a joint inquiry and report into these very issues because, crucially, health and education are intertwined when we look at mental health and physical wellbeing. The outcome of that inquiry was that I was very keen to lead in this debate, because I share her view that it is crucial to improve outcomes for children in care as well as for all our children and young people.

The statistics are startling. HeaducationUK highlights some of them: 850,000 UK children and young people aged five to 16 have mental health problems, which equates to around three in every classroom; more than 75% of mental illnesses in adult life begin before the age of 18; the number of young people attending accident and emergency with a psychiatric condition has risen by 106% since 2009; reports of self-harming among girls aged 13 to 16 rose by 68% between 2011 and 2014; and suicide is the biggest killer of young people aged under 35, with an average of 126 suicides a week and more than 200 children of school age dying by suicide each year.

**Chris Ruane:** Is my hon. Friend aware that 32.3% of 15 to 25-year-olds have one or more psychiatric conditions? The wider point about all those terrible statistics is that even people who are not adversely affected by mental ill health can be taught in school through modern positive psychology and mindfulness to lead flourishing lives. The whole wellbeing curve of mental health could be shifted if we took that root-and-branch approach to putting mental education into our schools.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. It is about not just shifting the life experience of an individual, but the knock-on effect of shifting the life experience of everyone around the individual and the whole community. We know that the lack of support and mental health education affects not only individual young people, perhaps for the rest of their life, but those around them. The potential returns from investing in our young people in that way are significant.

**Rachael Maskell:** Is it not crucial that we also understand the triggers, the causation, of mental health conditions in young people and where the stress factors fall, for example in the pressures of the exam system? Those issues should be addressed.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I agree with my hon. Friend. I will talk about that because it is one of the issues that

young people raise with me time and time again: the amount of stress and pressure that they feel under from a worryingly young age.

**Luciana Berger:** The figure my hon. Friend gave of three children in every classroom being affected comes from a study done more than 10 years ago. Does she, like me, look forward to the Government's review of young people's mental health in this country because, anecdotally and from what figures we have, more children are coming forward? The acuity of the conditions that they are affected by and of their feelings and whatnot are, in essence, elevated from previous levels.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree, and that is something I have seen even since I was elected in 2010. When I meet groups of young people, they used to be worried about their local parks—their availability or local vandalism—but now the No. 1 issue that young people raise is stress and anxiety. I will go on to talk about the range of factors involved, such as social media and its impact on young people, which is obviously positive but also has some clear negatives, with warning factors. The level of academic pressure that young people are under from a very young age is a big concern and one that I would like the Government to listen to seriously and address.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): I support the main thrust of the debate, but education is not the whole issue, although my hon. Friend is making some good points. The scandal that we are facing is about parity of esteem for support in schools—I totally support work on that—as well as the broken child and adolescent mental health services system. I have constituents who, even when they are facing crisis, wait for months or in some cases years to get a diagnosis. This is about not only education in schools but, when young people get into crisis, the scandal of the CAMHS system which, I am sorry to say, is just broken.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend speaks from great knowledge, experience and passionate campaigning. I agree very much with what he has said. We would not tolerate a child with a broken leg being left untreated for months on end, yet that is the case for far too many of our children and young people who present with mental health issues that clearly need professional attention. Such is the concern about the situation in my local area that the newly established community-led campaigning organisation Tyne and Wear Citizens has decided to hold an inquiry into the issue in the new year, very much based on feedback from groups of young people who have raised it as their key concern. I look forward to taking part in that inquiry in the months to come.

**Sir Oliver Heald:** I agree very much with the general thrust of what has just been asked and said, but does the hon. Lady also agree that making counselling available in the school, increasing awareness among parents of issues such as self-harm and anxiety, and having peer mentors—to take an holistic approach—can nip in the bud some conditions that could otherwise get worse?

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree, and we are not at odds in that viewpoint. What I hope comes out of the debate—what I hope the Minister listens to and

takes on board—is the holistic approach. It is about taking a whole-person approach in the education system, while ensuring that our health system matches it equally. We talk about parity, but my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) is absolutely right that that is not a reality for those needing mental health support. We need proper training and resources in schools from as young an age as possible to give that support and educational input and to ensure that specifically trained health professionals can provide support and treatment where necessary for young people.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is being very generous with her time. As has been mentioned, a survey by HeadEducationUK found that 75% of school leaders said they lacked the resources to meet the mental health needs of their pupils, citing the lack of training as one of the main contributing factors. I of course agree with the right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) that counsellors and an holistic approach would be beneficial and would help to nip the problem in the bud, but I would like to put on the record the massive funding pressure on schools. I am sure that teachers and heads will be looking at this debate saying, “Of course we would like to put that on, but we are currently having to cut core subjects from our curriculum, let alone looking at additional extras that it would be wonderful to have in schools.”

**Catherine McKinnell:** I absolutely agree, and my hon. Friend makes the case clearly, as I intend to in this debate. It is not about talking the talk but about walking the walk, to ensure that we have the resources necessary, not only for the training that our teachers need to feel confident about providing educational input where appropriate, but for trained professionals to be in place where required.

Schools are under inordinate pressure. I had a very difficult meeting with a local headteacher who struggled to hold back tears as she explained that she would have to lay off the school councillor for this financial school year—the choice was that or cancelling all the school excursions for the entire year. That is a very difficult decision for any headteacher to make, but there are school leaders up and down the country making those difficult decisions that ultimately will ensure that our children do not have the support that they need, and that children and their families are not looked after when they are in trouble, which will have long-term impacts on the education outcomes not only of that child but all the other children in that school.

**Luciana Berger:** I thank my hon. Friend for kindly giving way—I will not make any further interventions although I am very passionate and want to do so, but unfortunately I cannot stay for the entire debate. To add to the point about the passion that exists across the country, I had the opportunity to join the Liverpool Association of Secondary Head Teachers on a termly basis. Those headteachers are all passionate about their students' mental health, but in Liverpool we have just seen a cut to our young person's advisory service, which is the key mental health service for our young people, of 74%. That is a staggering amount—three quarters of a million pounds. Our main service for primary school children, the seedlings service, has also been taken away.

[Luciana Berger]

There is a big disconnect between what schools want to do for their students and what they are able to do, which is why this debate is so important.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I am delighted that hon. Members on all sides of this debate are making my case for me. I just hope that the Minister is genuinely listening and taking that on board, so that change and something positive can come from putting on record the cross-party agreement on the need to do something for our young people on this issue.

**Chris Ruane:** The figure that I mentioned of 32.2% of 15 to 25 year-olds will include trainee teachers. After they finish their training, 40% of teachers do not continue in education after the first year, largely because of stress, so does my hon. Friend agree that perhaps one way to square the circle would be to train those 18 to 21-year-old potential teachers in ways of getting their own equilibrium, which might be a gift that they can pass on to tens of thousands of children over the course of their career?

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend makes a key point. It is not just children and young people who face mental health difficulties as a result of the stressed environment in our education system, but the teachers, too. One has a huge impact on the other. Taking a whole-school approach to the issue could transform the lives of everybody in that school environment, all the families who surround it and are connected with it, and the local community.

**Lucy Allan:** Last week, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and I, along with other members of the Select Committee on Education, met teachers to discuss that very point about the mental health implications for them of being overburdened and overstressed by the many demands made on them. They made the exact point that the hon. Lady just made: that the mental health difficulties that they encounter inhibit them from helping their pupils. Does she agree that it is very important that the Green Paper includes provision for assisting teachers in dealing with their own mental health?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Lady put that very well.

Comments from Adam Shaw, the creator of the e-petition, are highly pertinent. He says:

“I would personally love to ask”

the Prime Minister

“and Government ministers what the benefits are for not having compulsory mental health education. If you really study this question and ask yourself it seriously, the more ridiculous the concept of not having it becomes.”

As I mentioned, in the last Parliament, the Education Committee, of which I was a member, and the Health Committee published a joint report, “Children and young people’s mental health—the role of education”, which concluded that

“Schools and colleges have a front line role in promoting and protecting children and young people’s mental health and well-being.”

We also welcomed the Government’s commitment in March to make personal, social, health and economic education and relationships and sex education a compulsory part of the curriculum from 2019. The Department for Education’s policy guidance accompanying the announcement confirmed that statutory PSHE is expected to cover

“healthy minds, including emotional wellbeing, resilience, mental health”,

and statutory RSE is likely to include

“how relationships may affect health and wellbeing, including mental health”.

However, in the context of this debate and the request of the e-petition, will the Minister say from what age he expects that to be covered in schools, and how much time he expects will be dedicated to it? It is important to highlight that we talking about a cross-party, joint Select Committee report, which expresses its support for

“a whole school approach that embeds the promotion of well-being throughout the culture of the school and curriculum as well as in staff training and continuing professional development.”

As such, we concluded:

“The promotion of well-being cannot be confined to the provision of PSHE classes.”

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** I am very sorry to intrude on the hon. Lady’s good nature by intervening again. I share everything that she says and I will support it to the nth degree, but I am worried about a question that needs to be answered. Given the diversity of teacher training, how will we get the kind of consistency required to deliver the excellent improvements that she suggests?

**Catherine McKinnell:** The right hon. Gentleman raises a pertinent question and one that I would be keen for the Minister to answer when he responds. This is not just about the young people who we want to benefit from a whole-school, holistic approach to mental health education; it is about the ability of our teachers, support staff and the wider school to deliver that. It is partly a training issue but partly, and significantly, also a resource issue. I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman raised that question and I would like to hear the Minister’s response.

The whole-school and universal approach to mental health is supported by the British Psychological Society and the Association of Educational Psychologists. The charity YoungMinds, which also campaigned on this issue, made the following recommendations to the Government in its recent report, “Wise Up: Prioritising Wellbeing in Schools”. It recommended that existing legislation should be updated

“to enshrine wellbeing as a fundamental priority of schools”

and that mental health and wellbeing should be established “as a central part of school improvement, by strengthening the focus on wellbeing provision within the Ofsted framework”.

It also recommended that a wellbeing measurement framework should be developed, trialled and established by 2020, that an

“understanding of wellbeing, mental health and resilience”

is embedded in all teacher training, and that schools are provided with

“designated funding to resource wellbeing provision.”

That leads me to a number of key issues that I believe must be addressed alongside the provision of compulsory mental health education if we are serious about genuinely supporting children and young people on this issue.

**Rachael Maskell:** On funding, does my hon. Friend not agree that it is economically expedient to put this training in place? I know from talking to a head of a primary school in York that she was spending all her time trying to support the mental health challenges of the children in her school, as opposed to being the head of the school, as it is so time-consuming. Therefore, putting the expenditure, funding and investment—if I can call it that—into ensuring that we have a proper mental health programme will actually save resources.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It feels uncomfortable to talk about this in monetary terms, but ultimately an invest-to-save policy approach would make huge differences, because if teachers and young people are better supported in their mental health and wellbeing, that will relieve pressures in that school and further down the system, and into adulthood and beyond.

The Government should take seriously the recommendations that I outlined from YoungMinds, which all address putting targets in place and the funding necessary to meet them. I want all children across the country to have the best possible education, filled with rigour and challenge—one that will provide them with the right knowledge and skills to set them up for their adult lives, where they will face many challenges, including in the workplace. However, I know from my time on the Education Committee and from regular conversations with school students, parents and teachers across my constituency just how much pressure young people feel under as a result of ever-increasing demands for schools to deliver the right academic results. Indeed, a constituent recently contacted me about her son, who was prevented from studying certain subjects at A-level despite having achieved good B grades at GCSE. She commented:

“My son is resilient but this has knocked his confidence as he is effectively being told he is not good enough at the start of a really important two years of school.”

There are increasing concerns about the introduction of the English baccalaureate and its significant narrowing of the curriculum at many secondary schools, which reduces the opportunity for many pupils to excel, such as the pressure on schools to deliver results in a small number of Government-defined core subjects.

There is really disturbing pressure on primary age pupils as a result of significant recent changes to the curriculum, school performance measures and SATs. A recent *Guardian* survey found that some 82% of primary school leaders had seen an increase in mental health issues among primary age pupils around the time of exams, with effects including loss of eyelashes through stress, sobbing during tests, sleeplessness, anxiety, fear of academic failure, low self-esteem, panic attacks and depression. That is in primary schools. I find that a really disturbing picture. Although I am pleased that the Government have listened to some of the concerns across the sector and agreed to scrap key stage 1 tests by 2023, the impact of high-stakes assessments clearly remains for key stage 2 pupils.

It seems to me that there is little point in the Government mandating compulsory mental health education in our schools while they actively undermine pupils’ mental health in the way that I have outlined and that I have seen in the young people I have spoken to and heard from. Indeed, the joint report of the Education and Health Committees concluded:

“Achieving a balance between promoting academic attainment and well-being should not be regarded as a zero-sum activity. Greater well-being can equip pupils to achieve academically. If the pressure to promote academic excellence is detrimentally affecting pupils, it becomes self-defeating. Government and schools must be conscious of the stress and anxiety that they are placing on pupils and ensure that sufficient time is allowed for activities which develop life-long skills for well-being.”

I look forward to hearing how the Minister intends to ensure that this situation is rectified, as it is clearly in the Government’s gift to do so. Of course, a plethora of other issues contribute to the poor mental health of far too many children and young people. The Select Committees’ joint report touched on some of those, which include social media pressures, cyber-bullying, internet safety, sleep deprivation and body confidence.

I seriously urge the Government to recognise just how detrimental families’ economic situations can be for children and young people’s mental health. As part of its breathing space campaign, the Children’s Society powerfully highlighted that

“children in low-income families with multiple debts are more likely to suffer from mental health problems than equivalent families with fewer debts.”

It is estimated that in my constituency alone, some 3,348 children live in families with problem debt. Again, it is in the Government’s gift to do something about that.

Of course, one of the key ways to ensure that our schools deliver something is measurement of it by Ofsted. Reporting to the Education and Health Committees’ inquiry, the Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health described Ofsted as the

“largest driving force in school practice”;

the Institute for Public Policy Research stated that the “Ofsted framework has a very strong ability to influence school behaviour”;

and the Education Policy Institute commented that the “benefit of having Ofsted look at wellbeing is that it is a signal to schools that it is part of their job, and it is not just about accountability measures and the academic side”.

However, IPPR research found that just one third of Ofsted reports made explicit reference to pupils’ mental health and wellbeing, even after personal development and wellbeing criteria were included in the Ofsted inspection framework. That is why the Select Committees’ joint report recommended:

“More must be done to ensure that mental health and well-being are given appropriate prominence in inspections and in contributing to the overall grade given to the school or college. The recently appointed Chief Inspector should, as a matter of priority, consider ways in which the inspection regime gives sufficient prominence to well-being.”

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend, who is making a compelling case and a thoroughly excellent speech; she has stolen nearly all the points I wanted to raise. She makes an important point about Ofsted and why it is wholly inappropriate

[*Louise Haigh*]

to roll mental health education into PSHE. Ofsted mentioned PSHE provision in just 14% of its secondary school reports and only 8% of its primary school reports under its most recent inspection framework. That shows how poor PSHE provision is in schools and why it is vital that mental health education provision is completely separate.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank my hon. Friend for both her kind comments and her intervention. We will go on repeating the same arguments and the same compelling case for change until the Government make the changes that we know are needed. I look forward to hearing the Minister's responses to the specific concerns that I outlined in relation to the Select Committees' joint report and to the concerns raised by my hon. Friend, from whom I hope we will hear more later.

It would be hugely remiss of me to lead a debate on this subject without touching on the increasing pressures on our education system. Although I firmly believe in the importance of mental health education in our schools, I am always reluctant to propose placing yet another requirement on teachers, who are hugely overworked and under-resourced, particularly given the ongoing financial crisis that many of our schools face.

Despite the Government's recent announcement about additional funding, the reality is that 88% of our schools still face a real-terms budget cut by 2020. In my constituency, that means Walbottle Campus losing more than £460,000 in real terms between 2015-16 and 2019-20—the equivalent of 10 teachers or £321 per pupil. For Gosforth Academy, it equates to a total real-terms loss of almost £430,000 in the same period. Those are staggering sums, and I know how agonising that is for headteachers who are trying to balance the books. I mentioned earlier that at least one of my local headteachers had to cut the school counsellor to make the necessary savings.

There is little point in seeking to introduce compulsory mental health education at the same time as budget cuts are resulting in existing mental health support for students and families being axed—a situation that is reflected around the country, as the evidence given to the Education and Health Committees showed. There is also little point in introducing compulsory mental health education or a whole-school approach to mental health if it is not done properly, which is why the Select Committees' joint report highlighted that doing so

“will have implications for staffing and training and the balance of provision and delivery of subjects across the curriculum to allow more time to focus on well-being and building resilience.”

Our report also emphasised:

“Teachers are not mental health professionals, but they are in many cases well placed to identify mental ill health and refer students to further assessment and support. Training school and college staff to recognise the warning signs of mental health ill health in their students is crucial. We encourage the Government to build on the inclusion of mental health training in initial teacher training and ensure current teachers also receive training as part of an entitlement to continuing professional development.”

I know that there is much support for that from hon. Members who have already contributed to this debate.

**Rachael Maskell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend; she is being generous with her time. Is there not a risk that teachers may feel pressure that they may miss

something if they have to refer people to the system, and therefore that they will be really concerned about over-referring or under-referring? That is why it is so important for mental health professionals to be available to support teachers and, more importantly, children.

**Catherine McKinnell:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. I wanted to come on to CAMHS, which my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) raised eloquently and powerfully. I support the introduction of mental health education in our schools, for that whole-school approach to be implemented, but I reiterate my concerns that teachers and schools must be adequately resourced and trained for that. School budget cuts, which are resulting in vital services being axed, must stop, and the Government must seriously look again at those issues that are causing young people's mental health to be so adversely affected. I also feel strongly that in promoting greater mental health awareness and encouraging children and young people to speak out and seek that help, we must ensure that treatment and support is available for them when they need it. We all know that simply is not the case for far, far too many young people affected by mental health conditions at present.

In the Care Quality Commission's recently published review of mental health services for children and young people commissioned by the Prime Minister, it found that

“whilst most specialist services provide good quality care, too many young people find it difficult to access services and so do not receive the care that they need when they need it. One young person told CQC that they waited 18 months to receive help. Using estimates from the London School of Economics, Public Health England reported that only 25% of children and young people with a diagnosable mental health condition accessed support. The Royal College of Psychiatrists has noted difficulties in finding specialist inpatient beds close to a young person's home.

CQC has rated 39%—26 services—of specialist community child and adolescent mental health services...as requires improvement and 2%—1 service—as inadequate against CQC's 'responsive' key question, which looks at whether people access care and treatment in a timely way.”

It went on to comment:

“The problem of gaining access to specialist help is contributed to and compounded by the fact that those who work with children and young people—in schools, GP practices and A&E...do not always have the skills or capacity to identify or support the mental health needs of children and young people. When concerns are identified, children and young people, and their families, often struggle to navigate the complicated and fractured system of services created by a lack of joined-up working. Many organisations are involved in planning, funding, commissioning, providing and overseeing support and care for young people with mental health problems. Poor collaboration and communication between these agencies can lead to fragmented care, create inefficiencies in the system, and impede efforts to improve the quality of care.”

That paints a deeply concerning picture, particularly in the light of the statistics I cited at the beginning of the debate. Indeed, the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield, has stated that the CQC's report makes for “sad reading.” She went on to comment:

“Like the CQC, I acknowledge there are efforts being made to change things and that the staff working in children's mental health are doing a good job in difficult circumstances. That was never my concern. It is those not getting the care they need...that worries me most...fewer than a quarter of children needing mental health support received it last year. There are severe shortages throughout the system, with the majority of local NHS areas failing to meet NHS standards on improving services.

Yet the numbers we cite on delays, expenditures and percentages can only tell you so much. The reason my office has focused so hard on...mental health this year is that we also hear—day in, day out—from children themselves, their carers, teachers and health system professionals about just how desperate the need is out there.”

I reiterate my concerns about the risks of introducing compulsory mental health education and a whole-school approach to this issue if we do not ensure at the same time a dramatic improvement in the support and treatment available to children and young people when they encounter a mental health condition. We must not have situations in which children wait 18 months to receive support, so that we are not simply ensuring that those children and young people will continue to be affected by those mental health issues throughout their lives, with all the long-term social, economic and personal costs associated with that.

I reiterate my absolute support for the issues the e-petition raises and the need to ensure that all children and young people receive good quality, age-appropriate mental health education throughout their schooling. I acknowledge that some progress has been made in this area: for example, the Education and Health Select Committees heard about the 2015-16 £3 million pilot between the Department for Education and NHS England to provide joint training to schools and CAMHS staff and to test how having single points of contact in both schools and CAMHS can improve referrals to specialist services. I also know from the Government’s response to the e-petition that they are developing a new Green Paper on children and young people’s mental health to be published later this year, with

“new proposals for both improving services and increasing focus on preventative activity.”

May I take this opportunity to press the Minister to ensure that the various concerns I and hon. Members have raised today—I am sure they will continue to be raised as the debate continues—are tackled as part of the Green Paper, if we are genuinely to address the wider issues for children and young people: the pressures they face as a result of issues in their school and home life; the severe financial pressures schools are now facing and the implications of that in their ability to provide mental health support; and of course the monumental pressure on CAMHS services, which has resulted in a system that is at breaking point? I also suggest to him that, instead of more pilots, promises or warm words about mental health, we take those urgent, necessary steps. We need Government action if we are to prevent the terrible statistics I have outlined throughout this speech, which are just getting worse.

Indeed, only yesterday it was reported that 12 mental health organisations, including the UK Council for Psychotherapy, the Mental Health Foundation and YoungMinds, have written to the Chancellor ahead of his Budget this month, saying:

“We cannot go on with such unambitious targets, or simply accept a situation where promises of extra funding don’t actually materialise at the front line. If the Government is actually to deliver parity of esteem, the Chancellor needs to invest in and ring-fence the mental health budget to ensure any money promised genuinely reaches those it is intended to help. The crisis is here, the crisis is now.”

I agree, and compulsory mental health education, if introduced, would be an important part of the jigsaw in tackling those issues, but only if it has the support it needs both financially and in Government action to make it a reality.

5.17 pm

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** I am grateful for the opportunity to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for the thoughtful and non-partisan way in which she approached this issue. She has done work with the petitioners, many of whom are here today, and I pay tribute to them for raising awareness of this. I also thank my predecessor as Chair of the Education Committee, and the current Chair of the Health Committee, who produced the report that the hon. Lady described. This debate is important, because we await the Government’s Green Paper on children and young people’s mental health. As I understand it, it will hopefully come out very soon.

It is essential to address the mental health of children and young people for their life chances and wellbeing, and for them to be able to climb the educational ladder of opportunity. The hon. Lady and others have quoted statistics showing that half of mental illness in adult life starts at the age of 15. In her report on mental healthcare in England, the Children’s Commissioner she says that according to the

“Millennium Cohort Study...of over 10,000 children born in the year 2000...At age 7, about 7% of both boys and girls have a diagnosable mental health condition...At age 11, about 12% of both boys and girls have a diagnosable mental health condition...At age 14, about 12% of boys and 18% of girls have a diagnosable mental health condition.”

My constituency experience is that the problem is getting greater and greater.

**Rachael Maskell:** I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman providing those statistics for the debate, but there is a real issue about young people not getting diagnoses, so the incidence is actually far higher. Children in my constituency often wait years for a diagnosis.

**Robert Halfon:** I have recently had a Westminster Hall debate about the same problem as it affects the parents of children with autism, and I agree with the hon. Lady. I did not want to repeat in my speech some of the things that other hon. Members had already mentioned, but she is right.

It is important to educate children and young people about mental health. I mentioned that in the previous Parliament the Education and Health Committees looked into the issue, and reported on it just before the general election. Both Committees recognised that schools and colleges have a front-line role in promoting and protecting children’s and young people’s mental health and wellbeing, and they recognised the need for education and mental health services to work closely together. One of the Committees’ key recommendations was to promote the whole-school approach, which embeds the promotion of wellbeing throughout the culture of the school and the curriculum, rather than confining it to PHSE lessons. They recommended that Ofsted should take the approach to mental health and wellbeing into account when inspecting and reporting on a school. The Institute for Public Policy Research report said:

“The Ofsted framework has a very strong ability to influence school behaviour”.

The Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health described it as the

“largest driving force in school practice”.

[Robert Halfon]

Dr Peter Hindley also said that, although he felt that too often the relevant aspect of the framework had not been implemented, nevertheless there was strong support for the idea that Ofsted should look at how mental health is dealt with in schools.

The need for strong partnerships between the education sector and mental health services is reflected in the report, and concerns were raised, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North and other Members mentioned, about the variation in the quality of links between schools and colleges and CAMHS. The Committee visited Regent High School in Camden where the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has been commissioned to run CAMHS. That partnership between education, health and the local authority was a great example of inter-agency co-operation.

When the excellent previous Minister for Children, Edward Timpson, appeared before the Health Committee, he said that the pilot would be extended to cover 1,200 more schools and that funding had been allocated for that next stage. In light of the kind of project that has been set up in Camden, will the Minister tell us the present position in relation to pilots, and what more is going to be done? The report by the Children's Commissioner says that it is important it is to have such medical support inside the school:

"Schools should be an access point for early support for children with emerging problems such as short courses of therapy. Where possible, this should be provided within the school. The Green Paper should be clear that council and NHS budgets should help to fund these services.

Where children have more serious needs, schools should be a referral point into specialised services."

Where there are issues that can exacerbate poor emotional wellbeing or mental health issues, we need to address the root of the problem. According to the Office for National Statistics, children who reported being bullied frequently were four times more likely to report symptoms of mental ill health. A third of children who said that they were unhappy with their appearance also reported symptoms of mental ill health, compared with one in 12 of children who were happy with their appearance. Children who spent more than three hours on social media on a school night were more than twice as likely to report symptoms of mental ill health as children who spent less time on such sites.

We need to ensure that we help children and young people to make sensible choices about social media. Our predecessor Committees recommended that schools should include education about social media in PSHE lessons, providing children with the skills and ability to make wise and better-informed choices about their use of social media. I ask the Minister and the Department for Education to conduct a serious study of the impact of social media—a separate issue from cyber-bullying, although that is very much part of it—on children's mental health. Then we will be able to see proper data, and the impact of what is happening.

The Minister relentlessly pursues high standards, and there is a lot of sympathy for that, but the pursuit of high academic standards should not come at the expense of children's mental health. Witnesses who gave evidence to previous Committees suggested that other subjects, such as art and creative activities, have been squeezed out,

but that those things help in developing lifelong skills for improving wellbeing. Last week, as my fellow Select Committee Member, my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) pointed out, the Education Committee held a round table with teachers, who spoke movingly about the pressure on children, and the mental health problems that they faced in the classroom. One participant told us of the importance of time for physical exercise and social skills, and for wellbeing and mindfulness. Achieving a balance between promoting academic attainment and wellbeing should not be regarded as a zero-sum activity. Increased mental health treatment and wellbeing can equip pupils to achieve academically.

That is something that I know from my constituency experience. Last year, their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited the Stewards Academy as part of the Heads Together campaign, which does a lot of work on mental health; it works with the mental health charity Place2Be, as well as fundraising for mental health services. The school was highly commended. Since it has placed an emphasis on looking after the mental health and wellbeing of its students its GCSE and other exam results have improved.

I welcome the Government's intention to publish a Green Paper. The Committee and I look forward to examining it, and to seeing whether the recommendations of the previous Committees have been taken on board. Statistics from the prevalence survey have been quoted. My concern is that the previous prevalence survey was done in 2004. I understand that there is to be one next year, but the Minister and the Secretary of State are rightly mindful of the importance of data in making decisions, and it is incumbent on the Government to analyse the data on the mental health problems of children in schools and to examine whether such problems are increasing as, anecdotally, many of us have found is happening in our areas. There is a need to consider whether funding restraint has led to an increase in the number of children suffering from mental health difficulties. I should be grateful if the Minister told us when the next survey will be published.

I mentioned that it is a false dichotomy to have to choose between academic standards and students' wellbeing. The Health Committee report noted that

"the Association of Directors of Public Health told us that 'Children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing have higher levels of academic achievement on average'".

That is an important statement. I mentioned that it would be good to study the impact of funding pressures. I recognise that the Government have recently made welcome announcements about the national funding formula. However, the report of the Children's Commissioner mentions a cost-benefit analysis in relation to resources for schools to deal with children's mental health difficulties:

"The Department of Health estimate that a targeted therapeutic intervention delivered in a school costs about £229 but derives an average lifetime benefit of £7,252. This is cost-benefit ratio of 32:1."

I think that that is a powerful statistic supporting the argument that if we put in resources we can make a difference and avoid huge cost pressures on the Exchequer later. Not only is it the right thing to do but it helps with funding.

Finally—I know other hon. Members want to speak—the aim of the Education Committee is to promote the educational ladder of opportunity and to look at the

skills problems we face. The first rung of the educational ladder of opportunity is addressing social injustice, and there is a real problem of social injustice here. The Government have done good work, but problems for children and mental health seem to be endemic in our school system for a variety of reasons that were ably set out by the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North. I urge the Minister and the Department for Education to treat the matter of social injustice with as much importance as they do raising standards and improving quality in our education system—something that the Minister is an important proponent of and has done so much to achieve.

5.30 pm

**Lucy Allan** (Telford) (Con): Thank you for calling me to speak in this important debate, Mr Brady. It is a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) for her inspiring opening to the debate.

We all agree that education is about preparing our young people for the future. Key to both success and survival in life is being able to build resilience and learning how to take care of our own wellbeing and mental health. Without doubt, that is the most vital tool in the armoury of any young person, as they will inevitably take on many challenges as they go through life. Schools have a critical role to play in promoting an understanding of self-care as it relates to exercise, diet, sleep, mindfulness and building strong social networks for support, as well as the negative role of alcohol and drugs in mental health and how to avoid the pernicious influence of social media and its effect on wellbeing. However, family, friends and healthcare workers also have a significant role to play.

I am pleased that today young people are far more likely to talk openly about mental health issues, whether in school, at home or with friends. There are real signs that the silence and stigma are being shattered, but there is much more work to do, and schools can play a vital part in that. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to mental health training—I think it was referred to mental health first aid training. I was not entirely sure what that meant, but mental health awareness training is a goal we should seek to achieve. I would like every school to seek to promote mental health awareness and to give students pointers on where to go, and all teachers to have an understanding of how to spot signs of mental ill health.

I welcome the forthcoming Green Paper on children's mental health, and I ask the Minister to consider an earlier Education Committee report, prior to the joint report between the Health and Education Committees that we have talked about. The earlier report was in the 2015-16 Session, when the Education Committee looked into the mental health of children in care. One of the points that emerged in that report was about navigating the system and getting access to support when a child might experience multiple placements in any one year. One of the blockages to accessing support was that without a stable placement, the child was not eligible to qualify for child and adolescent mental health services. I urge the Minister to commit to reading that report, because we took evidence from a large number of influential and knowledgeable people, and their recommendations and some of the proposals in the

report were somehow put to one side at the end of the last Session. Please, please can the Minister read the report and confirm that the upcoming Green Paper will specifically include provision for children in care and the need for school-based counselling for looked-after children?

To re-emphasise that point, during the inquiry into the mental health care of children in care, one child told us:

“The state took us away from our parents, the Government are now our parents. Parents will do anything for you”—

parents will help their children to navigate the system—but the state doesn't provide that.”

We have a special duty to those children in care, who do not have parents to fight the system for them and help them to get access.

About a year ago, we had a debate on that report in this Chamber. I urge the Minister to look back at what was said, because the excellent and much missed former Member for Crewe and Nantwich, then the Minister for Children and Families, had a great deal to say. He committed to a number of measures that I feel may also have slipped to the back of the shelf. I would love to see that work not going to waste but brought forward during the drafting of the Green Paper, so that the Committee's work, the Minister's commitment and the evidence of all the experts are not wasted. The then Children's Minister said that there would be an expert working group to consider access to mental health care for children in care via school systems. That may have fallen by the wayside, or the expert working group may be well under way, and I would be grateful to know which it is. If the Minister cannot answer that today, I would be most grateful if he did so in due course.

I hesitate to sound any discordant note in this collaborative and helpful debate, where we all want to achieve the same thing, namely improving the mental health of children in school, but I have concerns, and will sound a note of caution, about the compulsory element for all schools. I recognise that there is patchy provision across the country, but to my mind it is the CAMHS provision that is so patchy. I am wary of imposing on teachers yet another burden that becomes a tick-box exercise, so they can say, “We've done this—end of. We've dealt with mental health care of children. We gave that half-hour lesson in the personal, social and health and economic education class and that's finished. We don't have to deal with it anymore.” Schools may want to signpost students, discuss wellbeing through informal drop-ins or school counselling sessions, or they may want to make it a formal part of PSHE, but that may not always deliver the results we all seek for our young people.

I also question whether a school should be responsible for identifying our young people's mental health needs. As we have heard from many speakers today, teachers are not mental health professionals. They cannot replace the services of CAMHS and we should not ask them to do so. What role should we encourage families to take in helping young people to understand self-care and the pointers to where mental health support is required? We should all encourage young people to take care of their own mental health and wellbeing and, as they grow older, to accept some responsibility and accept that they can make a difference to their own mental health and seek out assistance and support where required.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** I entirely agree with the line that my hon. Friend is taking, but as I said to the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who so brilliantly introduced the debate, there are not enough teachers qualified to do that, and to get them all up to speed and consistently trained will be a very long-term project. What we need to aim for is a tiered service that works, where the teacher is able to help with more than just emotional first aid, but is then guaranteed to be able to pass the child through to the next stage, which will then deal with them. It is the next stage that simply fails in my constituency. It fails. That is the stage where, if a child can cope with their own mental difficulties—God knows that is hard enough—there is someone they can go and talk to, who can refer them on to someone who will do something about it.

**Lucy Allan:** My right hon. Friend makes a vital point. I would like to see mental health awareness built into the fundamental training of all teachers. To be a good teacher, someone has to have an understanding of the mental health issues and challenges that young people in their care will face.

Far more important than training one teacher to be a first aid counsellor is to give all teachers that awareness, so that they can identify the signs and be able to point people in the right direction and encourage young people to seek help. They could also then advise them on how to navigate the system and access that help, because one of the most difficult things in providing support to young people—to anybody with a mental health condition, in fact—is their accessing the support that they need. Somebody may go along to their GP and say they think they are having a mental health crisis, but how many people can actually navigate the appointments system and persuade their GP that that is the issue that they face? That is where young people need the most help possible, because navigating the available mental health system, which is of a high quality in some areas, is a complex process.

To give an example in support of my earlier point about a formal mechanism for educating young people about mental health within a PSHE framework, a young constituent told me in a recent surgery that she had learned all about child exploitation in school in a PSHE class. As she sat there listening and taking notes, she knew that she was a victim of child sexual exploitation at that time, yet she still felt unable—despite the fact it was being discussed within a classroom environment—to get the help she needed. She went through the motions of attending the class and nodding away, but she felt completely disconnected from what was going on; it did not bear any relation to her personal experience.

I therefore do not think that compulsory mental health education is enough; we should look for an entire shift in attitude. It is about creating an environment that gives the confidence to ask for help and to know where to go, and that says it is okay to ask for help. Perhaps that is the sticking point at the moment: young people can sit in a class, but do they know how to access the help they need, or even have the confidence to overcome some of the shame and stigma that still exists in going up to the teacher and saying, “Okay, I have a problem—what do I do?” That young person felt unable to do that, in the context of the child sexual exploitation problem that she faced.

**Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD):** I was a secondary school teacher and I delivered some PSHE classes. I remember that they were often not very satisfactory, because there were no exams, so young people did not take it particularly seriously. Also, they were often lumped into the last lesson of a particular school day. Would it not be a lot better if each school had a dedicated mental health lead? That would obviously be a teacher-led position, and each school could then deliver a strategy for dealing with mental health.

**Lucy Allan:** That is an excellent idea, although I would still like to see some form of training built into the basic PGCE training that all teachers receive. However, a dedicated individual with a strategy for the school, which the governors would be aware of and everybody would buy into through a whole-school approach, would be extremely helpful.

As I am sure anybody who has ever heard me talk about anything knows, I am instinctively wary of the state telling those at the coalface how to best deliver for the young people in their care. Education should never be about delivering as many qualifications as possible but always about preparing young people for life and the challenges that they will face. Building resilience is a key part of that.

**Catherine McKinnell:** The hon. Lady is making a compelling speech, and I understand her reservations about the state telling teachers how to do their jobs. However, a key issue, which I hope the Government will respond to, is the role of Ofsted and its power and influence over what schools can and cannot manage to do within their limited resources and the time in the school day. Will she take that into consideration?

**Lucy Allan:** The hon. Lady makes an important point about Ofsted’s role in all of this. Many teachers, who I am sure she speaks to, live in fear of Ofsted. I do not know if she has ever been a school governor, but Ofsted visits are quite a scary process, as is the whole concept of having one more box to tick—“Have I satisfied the safeguarding requirement? Have I satisfied the mental health requirement?” Instead of, “Have I met the needs of the children?”, it is, “Have I met the needs of Ofsted?” While I understand that that focuses the attention of the school, the governors and the teachers as a body, sometimes it becomes, “As long as I keep Ofsted happy, perhaps what I’m delivering to the young people in my care is a secondary priority.” I would be very concerned if that were the case.

**Catherine McKinnell:** I understand the hon. Lady’s point, and it is certainly one to consider, but the flipside to her argument is that schools are therefore so focused on delivering what Ofsted requires of them, in terms of ticking the boxes, that the holistic wellbeing of the young people and children in their care is perhaps not prioritised as much as it could and should be.

**Lucy Allan:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. What we must press for, and what we must ask the Minister to respond to, is that this becomes a priority for all schools. They should help their children to identify the signs of mental ill health and equip them with the skills to deal with those, as well as helping them to access the support that they need. All teachers must be trained to understand

the signs and the steps they can take, but we should be wary of forcing more burdens on to already overburdened schools and teachers, as we heard on the Education Committee last week.

The Green Paper is to be welcomed, and I urge the Minister to consider the recommendations of the Education Committee's report on the mental health of children in care. They are so often forgotten, and their mental health needs are often way above those of children in a family environment that helps them to overcome some of the challenges they experience, so it merits specific provision in the Green Paper. I will continue to press for that, so that those children are not forgotten. I thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North and everybody else who has come together today to make an important contribution on what is a huge issue for the future of our young people and their success in building a future in which they are able to cope with what life will throw at them.

5.47 pm

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on her formidable introduction. It was completely dispassionate yet very powerful about this terribly serious issue. I also congratulate my hon. Friends who have spoken. I will, unusually, speak very briefly, just to make a couple of points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) made an important point about the ability of children and young people to confront this issue for themselves, and also to have the immense guts required to tell someone that they really do have a problem. It takes a brave person to do that, who will quite often be in a very ugly place, which, if anyone knew what they were dealing with, would have been identified sometime beforehand. This is where the Government have an immensely important part to play in the very difficult area of children's centres and children's hubs and all the works that go towards trying to help people through these very difficult periods.

However, those children all end up back at school somehow, and it is the teachers who have to pick up the pieces if the parents cannot; often, the parents will not be able to, or will be so worried that they will not know how. As so often, the teachers have to rescue the day. It is not easy to do that in such a specialist area for someone who has not been properly trained to do so.

The hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) made mention of PHSE teaching. I had not thought of that, and it is true—if it is lumped at the end of the day, with no exam on it, who will take it seriously? I agree.

This issue is a fundamental part of growing up. Looking back on it, I know how lucky I was to have a happy, golden childhood. Parents come to see me in my surgery who are desperately worried about their children and anxious about what they will get at school. When we talk to the schools, the teachers say that they know they cannot do the job properly, and headteachers know they do not have the resources to do it.

My right hon. Friend the Minister and I live in West Sussex. He is a senior West Sussex Member, and he knows the difficulty that our local county council has with finance for this kind of thing. I was in a school the other day where I asked about mental health teaching

and was told that an excellent lady had done it, but she had moved on in a general sort-out and had not been properly replaced. We are back into what my hon. Friend the Member for Telford and my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) were talking about.

I think this is a national crisis. I wish, if I may, to stray a little beyond what I normally do in public and to congratulate the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry on what they have done to bring national attention to this issue in a very powerful, acceptable and touching way. We can see the connection they have with these young people and the way the young people look to them for help, which is what they are providing. I commend them and the Duchess of Cambridge very strongly for what they are doing. It is very important work, and I hope they will go on doing it.

I do not want to overdo it. There are a number of areas in our national life where we constantly face great difficulties, but this is a real national crisis, and the scale of it is only just beginning to be realised. I know the Minister will take very seriously what the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North said, but the whole question of training teachers is cardinal. I repeat that if there is not consistent teaching across a diversity of providers, there is no way these children will be able to access the kind of services we want to see. Headteachers and teachers do not have the time; they have so many things to deal with, and they need to be confident they have the skills and ability to see these children right in referring them to other services.

Mr Brady, thank you very much for calling me to speak. I apologise for speaking so briefly, as I know it will disappoint you, but there are others here who know much more about this than I do.

5.52 pm

**Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I do not intend to speak at great length. I would just like to reiterate the vital nature of this issue.

I support what my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said a moment ago: this has got to the point where it is of great national importance. Some years ago, I was my party's mental health spokesman, and at that time we were learning about children's mental health. We now have a real understanding of how early mental health problems can arise—something that was not fully understood back then—and how important it is to intervene as speedily as we can to tackle these issues, which can become much worse over time if that does not happen.

Hertfordshire County Council has supported the Northherts Emotionalhealth in Schools Service, led by a co-ordinator who is a very experienced school mental health counsellor. She is offering teacher training and support, and numerous teachers have now been taught about how counselling works and mental health issues that arise. Teachers have found that knowledge very useful for not only the students but themselves, because they also face pressures. The service offers training to parents, and forums are held on subjects such as self-harm and promoting resilience against anxiety, for which there is now quite a waiting list. It offers peer mentor training on positive mental health called "How to help a friend" and provides schools with registered counsellors, who are helping. There is close liaison with NHS services, so everybody knows what is going on. As my right

[*Sir Oliver Heald*]

hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex said, it is necessary to understand the problem but then also perhaps to pass it on, in cases of serious mental conditions.

That approach seems to be working quite well. The service has had support from the Anna Freud Centre and recently held a conference with early years and primary school staff. There was a really good response from everybody involved, including the Anna Freud Centre and Steve Mallen, who heads up the MindEd Trust. His son Ed took his life two years ago. Steve set up that charity and is very supportive of this approach. He believes it is helping parents, students and teachers. Comments that came out of the conference included,

“The workshops were particularly useful and I can see how they can be implemented in my school and be beneficial to the children and their families”

and,

“All of it was useful. A good balance between knowledge and practical stuff.”

This petition is about education in schools, but the Minister might like to look at the sort of service we have in north Hertfordshire, with his Green Paper in mind. Finally, it is worth mentioning that young people, of course, are marvellous with digital and social media. I understand that some apps are available that can help with anxiety and reinforce messages. He might want to look at that too.

5.56 pm

**James Morris** (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on putting the case so cogently for the importance of education about mental health in schools.

In preparation for the debate, I reflected on the distance we have come and the sense that we still have a long way to go on what I would call mental health literacy. I remember being at school in the late 1970s and early 1980s and having, as a 13 or 14-year-old, a sense of anxiety and some sense of uncertainty about the future. I could not label the condition I was suffering from at that time, but subsequently I learned that it was called depression. I think I had a depressive episode of quite a severe nature when I was about 13 or 14 at school. At that time, it was not a condition that was being labelled, so I did not have a way of talking about it that made sense. In the school environment of the 1970s and 1980s, teaching staff did not have the capability and my peers did not have the awareness of what mental health really meant.

The truth is, as other Members have said, that we have come a huge distance over the last 30 years. It would be churlish to characterise what we face today as a unique set of contemporary circumstances. The debate about mental health and our understanding of young people's mental health has come a huge distance, as has the way in which it is represented in our media and the way we have talked about it in Parliament over the last few years. As you may know, Mr Brady, I was chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mental health in the last Parliament, when we had a series of very important debates about mental health that galvanised and were a lightning rod for further discussion in the public realm about young people's mental health.

The representation of mental health in drama and soap operas has undergone quite a revolution. There was a time when young people's mental health was often talked about only in terms of negative, stigmatised associations with suicide and so on. The public's and schools' awareness of mental health has undergone some degree of transformation.

**Wera Hobhouse:** The broad consensus in the Chamber on this subject is really welcome. Like the hon. Gentleman, I very much welcome the fact that the stigma about mental health is starting to go away and people can talk more openly about their issue, but helping young people requires resources. Norman Lamb, who was the initiator of an initiative called Future in Mind, secured funding, during the coalition Government, of £1.25 billion, to be spent over the next five years. That should amount to £250 million each year, but only £143 million was released in the first year of the programme, 2015-16. Should not we all in this Chamber urge the Minister to continue that commitment and the budget that was secured under the coalition Government?

**Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair):** Let me just remind the hon. Lady that her colleague should be referred to in the Chamber as the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, rather than by name.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I apologise, Mr Brady.

**James Morris:** I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. The simple answer to her question is yes.

[*PHIL WILSON in the Chair*]

The Government are, as I understand it, fully committed to that additional investment over the five years of this Parliament. The truth is that a lot of progress has been made under the current Government in terms of further investment in child and adolescent mental health services. Obviously, there is more to do, and Future in Mind, to which the hon. Lady refers, was a very good initiative, led by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) when he was the Minister with responsibility for mental health. I am not arguing that somehow that money will magically transform the CAMHS system, but the truth is that some progress has been made in understanding the extent and prevalence of children and young people's mental health problems. The Department of Health is beginning to gather, for the first time, meaningful data about what is happening in the system. That was never in place before; child and adolescent mental health was a data-free zone until very recently.

Also, in terms of the extra money, we have only started to understand and have the data on where the money is actually being spent. The NHS dashboard that has been created for mental health is, for the first time, acting as a tool to put pressure on local commissioners to spend the money that they have been allocated. Clearly, there has been a discussion about this. The money is not ring-fenced currently, but with the dashboard created by the Department of Health, we can see what local clinical commissioning groups are spending on child and adolescent mental health. That should be used as a tool to continue to put pressure on commissioners to make the right sorts of choices.

I mentioned what the vision and set of principles should be for this area. In the school environment, we should be trying to move towards what I call mental health literacy, which means giving young people the facility to talk about the mind and their mental health in a way that is intelligible for them and their peers. That is what we should seek to achieve in this context. We have had a very rich debate talking about this issue. I do not think that it is just a question of what is in the curriculum. Young people and children as they are growing up will listen to teachers in a particular way. They might not really want to listen to the message that the teacher is giving, because the teacher may represent a position of authority that they feel uncomfortable with. I am not saying that it is not important that teachers are trained and aware and that there is provision in the school environment, but that is not the whole picture.

We need to consider two further aspects. Peer pressure or peer conversation is almost as important as what is in the curriculum. I am talking about a structure in the school environment that allows young people to talk with one another about mental health, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and literacy to be able to have that conversation. I remember that back when I was at school, I felt very isolated—a sense of isolation—that somehow what I was thinking about was not legitimate; it was something dark and horrible and I was the only person who could possibly be having that issue at the age of 13 or 14. It is extremely liberating for young people when they realise that a vast range of their peers have the same sorts of questions about the future. It is relatively normal for adolescents to have periods when they are very uncertain about the future and how they fit in with their peers. They may have particular issues, but that ability for the school community, for children and young people together, to be able to talk about that is vital. It is a kind of therapeutic valve in the school environment, which I think is critical. In fact, much of the evidence base that I have seen shows that peer-to-peer communication on mental health in schools is extremely effective as a mechanism for helping young people, so that is the vision of what we should seek to achieve.

Also crucial, as other hon. Members have mentioned, is the involvement of families in the conversation. Families should not be excluded from the conversation, but brought into it as part of the process that we are describing, because obviously the family is the crucible in which a young person is brought up. For many young people, that is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said, a golden experience, but for many other young people it is characterised by dysfunction and relationships breaking down; it is often characterised by confusion.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** I agree with that point and ask my hon. Friend to consider the excellent work being done by our hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) on family hubs and centres, which I think is remarkable. If people are in the very unhappy position described, the trouble is that there is no one single signpost for them other than, as I said, the poor teachers, so the family hubs or centres are immensely important and must be encouraged and developed.

**James Morris:** I definitely agree with my right hon. Friend on that. As I said, the family is the crucible. The issue is often very complex, and the relationship between

the family and the school is a critical part of what we are discussing because, again, families can be a place where therapy is very effective, and can be a very effective way of helping the child and making them resilient, so I very much agree with my right hon. Friend's point.

**Robert Halfon:** Could I add just one qualification? Children with mental health difficulties may be experiencing significant family breakdown and may not be able to have the family involved, and therefore the school is literally the one place that can really help the child. That goes back to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) and others said about teacher training and a young person being able to go to someone in the school who can actually look after that student.

**James Morris:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention. I totally agree: clearly, it will not be possible to involve the family in all cases. I have seen examples in my constituency, particularly in the primary school environment, in which headteachers and teachers have taken really interesting and creative decisions to replicate the family environment for children who have not been brought up in a stable family environment and have not entered primary school in a properly socialised way. They have replicated the family environment and tried to create those kinds of structures because they have been absent, so I completely agree with my right hon. Friend on that.

Other hon. Members have talked about CAMHS and I want to make a few comments about early intervention. If you look at the spectrum of what we are talking about, it could be argued that by the time children get to school any mental distress and difficulties they suffer from will have been baked in for many years. There has been a debate about early intervention and mental health for years; it is what I would call a policy no-brainer. Everybody agrees we should intervene earlier. Everybody agrees that in principle that is a good thing. Yet we are still debating about whether we are doing it sufficiently well and how it should be done. The truth is that we should shift resources to where the evidence points us.

The evidence points to the joint Green Paper on children's health and education, and adolescent mental health, which other hon. Members have mentioned. The evidence suggests that interventions at an early age, sometimes pre-primary school, are the most effective interventions that we can make on a therapeutic level. From the evidence, it looks like working with children from birth to the age of two, working with families, and working with parents is the most effective intervention we can possibly make. I urge the Minister to be bold in terms of what we will do in that Green Paper. If we can do only one or two things from that Green Paper, we should focus on the really important one, which is shifting resources to genuinely effective early intervention based on evidence. Everything else we have talked about, such as mental health first aid and so on, has a role to play in this debate, but it will not solve the problem we are trying to confront. We will solve this problem by focusing a lot more resources in a laser-like way on early intervention—even before school. That is the critical part of this debate. The one bold move for the Government would be to focus their attention on that. Then we might be able to make significant progress.

[James Morris]

Other hon. Members have mentioned CAMHS. If we were designing a child and adolescent mental health service today, we would not design it in the way it currently operates. We have had several reviews of CAMHS over the last decade. Other hon. Members have mentioned Future in Mind, the CQC has just done its review and there have been other reviews. We know that CAMHS is currently not fit for purpose. That is not to say that people working in CAMHS are not doing an excellent job in delivering the services they do, but we need a more integrated service. We need to move away from the tiering approach, which means we concentrate on tier four—that is children with the most severe mental illness. If we can get rid of this metaphor of tiering and focus on access to the appropriate level of care required by a child or young person in a place appropriate to them and deal with it across the spectrum, and integrate it with initiatives that are being taken in schools and the initiatives I have been talking about in relation to early intervention, we can make significant progress.

We have come a long way. People use the word “crisis,” which I am always very wary of using. It is not as if this crisis started today. The debate about children and young people’s mental health has been going on since about 1962 when Enoch Powell, then the Public Health Minister, made the decision that we would no longer put people in asylums but would move towards a community model. That was in 1961 or 1962. We are only now beginning to have a real debate about how we really tackle some of the underlying issues that we face in society in terms of the mental health of children and young people. We are much better at talking about it, but the debate actually is only just beginning and the Government have an opportunity to take some really bold steps, which would have a lasting legacy.

6.15 pm

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I apologise, Mr Wilson, for dipping out for an hour. I had to meet Carwyn Jones, First Minister of Wales, at a Welsh group meeting, but I was here for the first 30 minutes and I did intervene on many occasions on my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell).

The World Health Organisation says that by 2030 the biggest health burden on the whole of the planet will not be heart disease or cancer; it will be depression. The term “burden” is not a pejorative but a descriptive term for the burden on the individual, their family, society and the economy. This tsunami of mental ill health is coming our way, and I believe that we are ill-prepared for it—ill-prepared for how we treat our adults and especially our children and young people.

In the 19th century, Frederick Douglass said:

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”—

he definitely should have said, “and women.” That is the situation today. If we can build strong children and give them that resilience, it benefits the individual child and their family, and the knock-on effects of building in that resilience from an early age will benefit our economy and health service down the decades.

I am speaking today about mindfulness. I am co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mindfulness—I draw hon. Members’ attention to my declaration of interest.

I gave the statistic in an intervention earlier that 32.3% of 15 to 25-year-olds experience one or more psychiatric conditions. That is while they are studying for their GCSEs, A-levels, degrees or post-graduate degrees. They are studying and living sub-optimally, and their suffering is magnified because we have not put the strategies in place to help those young people to cope with the modern stresses of society. Our Ministers and health service say that oral hygiene is very important, and we must brush our teeth three times a day; that nutritional health is very important, and we must have our five fruit and veg a day; and that physical activity is very important to keep our bodies healthy. But how much time is allocated to looking after our own minds, our own brains and how we actually view the world?

There are many stresses out there affecting young people. There are the stresses of advertising. Young people have Maccy D’s telling them to “Go large,” and the fashion industry saying “No, no—size zero.” The average child will see 120,000 adverts a year and the messages are well researched and well honed, especially in a digital age, when every time a young person goes on a computer an algorithm calculates what is going on inside their head and sends micro-messages to them. The point of advertising is to make people unhappy with what they have, so that they will purchase something else.

The impact of social media has already been mentioned by many speakers. When I went to school in the 1960s, if I had a fall-out, it was with five or six people. Now it could be 5,000 or 6,000 people. Being tested at school—at the ages of five, seven, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 21—produces massive stresses on young people. We are not equipping them with the capability to deal with those stresses; in fact we are adding to those stresses. There are many other factors that are bringing stress to our children and young people today.

We as politicians should be doing something about that, and I am pleased that this is an area we can agree on. I pay tribute to the former Prime Minister David Cameron for measuring wellbeing and saying—he was quoting Robert Kennedy—that GDP and wealth are not enough; we must look at the wider benefits to society and what makes us click as a society and as individuals within that society. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for declaring in January that mental health, and children’s mental health, will be right at the top of her priorities. Our own shadow Chancellor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), quoted Robert Kennedy at the Labour conference in saying that the wellbeing of society is important. This is an area where we can, and should, come together.

I want to stress the impact that I believe mindfulness can have. Mindfulness has been freely available on the national health service since 2004. Some people might think that it is a bit woolly, but the copper-bottomed science has been proven to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence by Professor Mark Williams, John Teasdale and Zindel Segal from Canada. Mindfulness has been available, but the take-up is minimal. The science has been proven for this intervention, which puts the individual in control and is cheaper in the long term than antidepressants or talking therapies, yet the take-up has been minimal. Again, I pay tribute to the Government, because they have promised to train an extra 200 or 300 mindfulness-based teachers over the

next two years, and that is progress. We have been teaching mindfulness to MPs, peers, their staff and civil servants in Westminster.

**Lucy Allan:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very interesting point about the benefits of mindfulness. I have had the great pleasure of participating in the MPs' mindfulness training, and have to say that it is quite a challenge to get MPs to turn off their phones and concentrate. Does he agree that we need to encourage more people to understand the benefits of mindfulness and to participate in it?

**Chris Ruane:** Absolutely. Ghandi said, "Be the change you want to see." We are change-makers in this room, and we need to make our personal, political and parliamentary decisions from a position of personal equanimity and balance. If we do that, we will be doing tribute to ourselves and our society. Some 150 MPs and Lords have had the training, and we instituted a parliamentary inquiry on mindfulness in health, education, criminal justice and the workplace. We have put forward recommendations.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I appreciate the benefits of a healthy mind, a strong child and preparing children and young people for the challenges in life, but does the hon. Gentleman see that even though someone might have been brought up in a happy, healthy family, mental health issues can hit them at any point? There is not prevention for mental health in the same way as for other things, because we never know what will happen or come round the corner. We need to monitor mental health throughout the years, again and again and again.

**Chris Ruane:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. That is what is happening in mindfulness research. Bangor University is looking at mindfulness for the baby in the womb. The biggest cause of low birth weight babies is maternal stress—either directly or through legal and illegal drugs, tobacco or alcohol—and it is working on a curriculum for babies in the womb. Bangor University is looking at a mindfulness curriculum for three to seven-year-olds; it already has one for seven to 11-year-olds. The .b course has been devised for 11 to 18-year-olds by top mindfulness experts who actually teach in the Palace of Westminster. There is another £7 million study into the effects of mindfulness on 11 to 18-year-olds at Oxford University called the MYRIAD project. Hopefully, the interim report will be published around 2020. If that scientific evidence is proven, as decision makers and policy makers we should look carefully at it. If we can get on top and provide that resilience to children and young people from the age of three, we should be implementing that.

I want to draw hon. Members' attention to what we are doing in mindfulness to help us in our initiative to ensure that the proven science of mindfulness is taken up in the national health service, the education service and the criminal justice service. Some 85% of prisoners have one or more mental health issues, and some people are incarcerated from a very young age. Again, we owe it to them to look after them and to give them the best provision available.

I mentioned this in an earlier intervention, but the bell curve of wellbeing includes people who are well below that curve, the majority who are somewhere

above that position of mental ill health, and a few who are flourishing. If we can shift the whole of that wellbeing curve along, the biggest beneficiaries will be those with the poorest mental health, but it will also help everybody on the curve. Mindfulness can be used not just to give people back their equanimity, but for human flourishing. This question has been posed for thousands of years, but something seems to have gone wrong in society over the past 30 years. We have had a tsunami of mental ill health washing over the whole of the world, and especially the western world. We give more credence to the pursuit of money and wealth than to individual, family, societal and community wellbeing. It is time that we took stock and asked ourselves what is important in life. The most important thing for me is to think from a position of balance. There are curricula and courses that can be taught to young people, and we are failing if we do not put those provisions in place.

Again, as I said in an earlier intervention, there is a way that we can help those students who go to university at 18 to become teachers in three or four years' time, or who go at 18 to be medics or doctors and come out at 25 to be GPs. Many of those young people are in stress themselves—"Physician, heal thyself". If those young students can be given the skills to get their own personal balance, when they go through their career as a GP, nurse, midwife, teacher or lecturer, they will remember the benefits that they have had—the equanimity and the ability to concentrate, to focus, to improve their grades and to improve their way of living—and they will be able to touch thousands of minds over the course of their medical or educational career. It is a huge problem that is out there, and some of the answers could be quite simple.

**Phil Wilson (in the Chair):** Before we move on to the Front Benchers, the mover of the motion has indicated that she would like two or three minutes, if we get that far, at the end to wind up.

6.27 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I especially want to thank the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell), who excellently set the scene about where we are and where we all hope to progress to. That is the issue: we have come some way, but we are still on a journey in terms of mental health services across people's lifespans.

I thank the Petitions Committee and the members of the public for supporting a debate on mental health education in schools. It shows that it is extremely important to all: our community, our constituents, children, adults and parents. It is important to MPs, as we can see today. There has been such a great consensus—it is one of the debates that I have attended where there has been such a great consensus—and that is so important to see.

I must declare an interest in mental wellbeing as a psychologist, although I worked largely with adults. I am also a member of the British Psychological Society. I was saying earlier today at a conference on trauma counselling that I think now is a pivotal moment for mental health. We all know, and are in agreement, that something has to be done across the lifespan, and this is our opportune moment to take that forward.

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

The petition calls for mental health education to be made a mandatory part of primary and secondary school education. That is important. Across the UK and the devolved Governments, we cannot go on with this postcode lottery. It is happening everywhere—no one service is perfect—and we all have so much progress to make. We have all been trying to make sure that services are in place. I see from my own career how far things have come, but we cannot continue with the postcode lottery. It is not fair on people. It is not fair on parents or children. We must address young people's mental health.

Only 70% of secondary schools and 52% of primary schools currently provide counselling. Research suggests that one in 10 children aged from five to 16 suffers from a diagnosable mental health disorder. It is so important that that is picked up at an early stage. As has been stated so eloquently in this debate, including through Members' personal experiences, if we can identify and support such children at a key early stage, prevention and early intervention will be by the far most effective interventions. That is why it is so crucial for resourcing to be targeted at that level.

Seventy-five per cent. of children and young people experiencing a mental health problem are not accessing treatment. This is the tip of the iceberg, so much more resourcing is desperately needed. In ensuring that people can come forward and speak, and that they have awareness about mental health issues and can seek treatment, we must ensure that they can access resources for support and treatment at every stage. Ninety per cent. of teachers have reported increased rates of anxiety and depression among pupils over the last five years. Clearly, we need this debate and a consensus and, importantly, we need action.

Mental health first aid training for all teachers is a welcome step forward. It has been mooted that teachers are already overburdened and that adding to their stretched teaching lives might make things very difficult for them. However, I would suggest that they are overburdened because these issues are already prevalent. Children are experiencing them, so we must ensure that they are identified and that adequate care pathways are available. If teachers can have awareness training to pick up early symptoms, that early detection will be key for prognosis.

The Green Paper on children and young people's mental health is expected later this year, and I am extremely keen to hear what the Minister can tell us about that today. I hope he will indicate the type of progress that might be made, because we are all keen, listening ears here today and right across the United Kingdom. We must share best practice and look at the pilots working in each area of the UK, and we must ensure that those are rolled out when evidence-based practice is making a real difference for children and young people.

The collaboration between education and health services must be improved. The care pathway is needed. As I have said, identifying the issue and enabling young people to speak about it is the first stage. However, many of them will then need to access adequate help at different levels of the care pathway. It is important that we focus on mental health at a school level, because if children can verbalise their issues and teachers can recognise them, we will start to make the progress required.

This is not so much about mental illness, but about teaching wellbeing and coping skills and skills for life. The earlier we can do that, the better—even at pre-school, which has been spoken about, that is key—because the earlier that modulating emotions, concentration and mindfulness can be taught, the greater success children will have going into their adulthood. They will have a greater ability to cope with the stressors that will come into their lives later and they will go on to experience fewer difficulties that require treatment. Addressing this issue is not only economically vital, but about skilling up our future generation to cope with mental wellbeing and to cope holistically with life.

There is a need to push for a statutory footing with clear guidance. I agree with the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) that interventions need to be peer-to-peer based and child-friendly. Children use a variety of digital technologies that are well beyond my capability, but that is how they operate in today's society. They listen to one other—in adolescence, they listen to one another much more than they do to parents and teachers—so we must use our knowledge to ensure that peers educate peers and that we tap into digital technology for a positive response. All too often, social media can have a negative impact on mental health, fostering a culture of bullying. Some children believe that they do not have as many friends online or that they do not measure up, but we can tap into the resources that children use and turn that around, ensuring that their mental wellbeing is a key part of those apps and social media.

Focusing on diagnostic testing and access to it is also key, particularly for autism, and I have tried to champion it throughout my time in this House, because it is badly needed. Parents continually come to us all saying that they are unable to access adequate services. We need a map of clinicians with the relevant training around the UK, so we can look at where the gaps are in autism diagnosis training. We then need to fill those gaps and make sure that, no matter where someone stays, if they require a diagnosis, it happens, so that parents can access the services required for their child.

The British Psychological Society is calling for access to applied psychologists to ensure the full assessment of complex cases. We have heard about the types of complex cases that should perhaps be prioritised, including looked-after and accommodated children who might have already experienced trauma and might be most at risk.

In conclusion, I will speak briefly about a couple of my constituents. The first wrote to me as a very concerned parent, desperate for support for her 10-year-old child who struggled for years with her mental health but who has been unable to access child and adolescent mental health services. I will take that case forward, but just how many more parents are struggling with those issues across the United Kingdom? We must all work together across all the nations to ensure that we fill those gaps.

Helen Mitchell is an excellent lady who has triumphed over adversity and runs the Trust Jack Foundation, a trust created in memory of her son who suffered mental illness and took his own life. She supports services for young children suffering mental illness, including art therapy, support groups and befriending. We must remember that it is not just skills but the community and health—all of us must work together to ensure that mental wellbeing is something we take forward positively for all.

6.38 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I acknowledge the good work done by the Shaw Mind Foundation in securing the debate. For Adam Shaw, the foundation's chairman and founder, after struggling for 30 years with his own mental health, which led him to the brink of suicide, this is a personal issue. It is vital that we listen to the voices of those such as Adam who have experienced mental ill health in their childhood. They are telling us that understanding our own mental health is a life skill, which should be part of our childhood education as much as reading and writing. The response from the public to Adam's petition shows that that view is shared by many people in the UK. This debate has left us in no doubt that action needs to be taken now to safeguard our children's mental health.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) made an exceptional speech. It was a real tour de force, highlighting national and local policy and bringing in individual cases from her constituency. The 103,000 people who signed the petition so that it could be debated in Parliament today can be extraordinarily proud of her contribution.

Other contributors to this debate include the Chair of the Select Committee on Education, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). I could not agree more that mental health requires a whole-school approach rather than just being pushed into PSHE lessons. As a former PSHE co-ordinator for a primary school in the borough of Trafford, which I represent, I know that mental health cannot be taught in the time given to that subject. More must be done.

The hon. Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), who is also a member of the Select Committee, spoke extraordinarily powerfully about the stigma that needs to be shattered; this debate is part of doing so. I join the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) in congratulating the Duke of Cambridge and Prince Harry, who have raised the issue. He also spoke powerfully about the need for teacher training to incorporate mental health education in colleges and universities up and down the land.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) gave an extraordinarily powerful personal testimony about his own mental health during his childhood. MPs being brave in that way in public life are beginning to shatter the stigma. The right hon. and learned Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) also spoke eloquently about the good practice that he has seen between NHS councils and schools in his constituency. We need exemplars of good practice across the land.

My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), citing the World Health Organisation, said that mental health would be the defining issue of the 21st century and that there is a tsunami coming. He is a passionate advocate for mindfulness day in, day out in this place. We have had an extraordinarily good debate. As a former teacher, I know that schools are struggling to deal with an upsurge in mental health needs among pupils.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), in an excellent speech, brought her clinical prowess and expertise to this Chamber.

As she pointed out, statistics show that one in 10 children have mental health issues. That is three children in every classroom of 30. One in five adolescents experience a mental health problem in any given year. A recent survey by the union NASUWT involving more than 2,000 teachers and school leaders further underlined the scale of the problem: 98% said that they had come into contact with pupils whom they believed were experiencing mental health problems, and 46% said that they had never received any training on children's mental health or on recognising the signs of possible mental health problems in children.

We know that half of people with mental health problems as adults present symptoms by age 14, and 75% do so by age 18. Shockingly, suicide is the most common cause of death for boys between the ages of five and 19. Data from a recently published Government study showed that one in four girls are clinically depressed by the time they turn 14, and hospital admissions for self-harm are up by two-thirds; the number of girls hospitalised for cutting themselves has quadrupled over the past decade.

I also want to point to research on the LGBT community. Stonewall found that more than four in five young people who identify as trans have self-harmed; that is an incredible statistic. Three in five lesbian, gay and bi young people who are not trans have self-harmed. Shockingly, more than two in five trans young people have attempted to take their own life. For that community, mental illness rates are huge.

The number of young people aged under 18 attending accident and emergency for a psychiatric condition more than doubled between 2010 and 2015, yet just 8% of the mental health budget is spent on children, although children represent 20% of the population. Referrals to CAMHS, as has been mentioned, increased by 64% between 2012-13 and 2014-15, but more than a quarter of children and young people referred were not allocated a service. Perhaps most damningly, Public Health England estimates that only 25% of children and young people who need treatment for a mental health problem can access it.

Following the groundswell of evidence of mental ill health in our children and young people and the system's abject failure to deal with it, the Prime Minister announced in January, to a fanfare, a package of measures aimed at transforming mental health support in schools, workplaces and communities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) pointed out following the Prime Minister's announcement, that will not deal properly with the burning injustice faced by children and young people with mental ill health.

I am afraid that this Government talk a good game on mental health, but in reality, they have continued to underfund services. The Government's proposals do nothing to improve waiting times for treatment for children and young people, and they put pressure on schools to take on extra work on mental health, at a time when they are having to cut budgets. The Minister and I have been no strangers to discussing budget cuts in this Chamber over the past six months.

The evaluation of the mental health services and schools link pilots published in February underlined the lack of available resources to deliver the Government's offer universally across all schools. Headteachers are telling us that real-terms cuts of £2.8 billion to school

[Mike Kane]

budgets threaten existing in-school care. On top of that, funding for child and adolescent mental health services fell by almost £50 million between 2009-10 and 2012-13. The Government also cut £600 million from mental health budgets between 2010 and 2015, and the number of mental health nurses in our country has decreased by 6,000 since 2010. Our Government continually expect our teachers, schools and health services to do more for less.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mike Kane:** I would love to give way to the right hon. Gentleman, so I can regroup and have a glass of water.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** I do not want to spoil the harmonious general cross-party agreement on this point, but the hon. Gentleman's litany of despair occurs against the background of a substantial investment in mental health in this country. The problem—I see it in my constituency, and I am sure that everyone in this room sees the same thing—is the time from what, in the Army, they call flash to bang. Once the money is voted and put into the service, it takes a very long time to bring through properly qualified people to deal with the problems.

**Mike Kane:** The right hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently about the need for better mental health provision for teachers throughout our country, but I point out to him, as part of the litany of despair, that a third of teachers who have trained since 2011, on this Government's watch, have already left the profession. We must deal with these issues if we are to have a future cadre of teachers who are adequately trained in mental health education.

On the upside, there are things that we can do. We could invest in CAMHS early interventions by increasing the proportion of mental health budgets spent on support for children and young people. In order to protect service, we could also ring-fence mental health budgets and ensure that funding reaches the frontlines. We know that school counselling is an effective early intervention; Labour have committed to ensuring that access to counselling services is available for all pupils in secondary schools.

Early intervention is much cheaper to deliver, as has been pointed out. The Department of Health estimates that a targeted therapeutic intervention delivered in school costs about £229, but derives an average lifetime benefit of £72,525. That is a cost-benefit ratio of 32:1. Of children and young people who had school counselling in Wales in 2014, 85% did not need any onward referral to children and adolescent mental health services.

The sad fact is that the Government's plans for school budgets will result in further cuts to school counselling and wellbeing services. Labour has said that it will fund and ensure that every secondary school in England and Wales offers counselling. This Government's sticking-plaster approach to our children's mental health has not been, is not and will not be good enough. I urge the Minister to look closely at the recommendations of the first joint report of the Education and Health Committees, "Children and young people's mental health—the role of education".

Teachers are not mental health professionals, but they are the frontline professionals in daily contact with our children and young people, and are often the first to spot the signs of mental ill health. They are also overworked, underpaid and under-resourced, so adding an additional responsibility to their workload without the necessary training and investment will only deepen our teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Our schools need an honest approach from the Government that acknowledges the £2.8 billion real-terms cuts in school budgets since 2015.

We must act now and give our children the knowledge and confidence to take charge of their own mental health. If we do not, we will never be able to relieve the huge strain on our NHS, CAMHS, social services and teachers. The Prime Minister must make good her pledge and act on children and young people's mental health. If the Government believe in parity of mental and physical health, they will ensure not only that age-appropriate mental health education is available for children in our schools from primary school upwards, but that our schools are properly funded with the resources to deliver that.

6.51 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Wilson. I congratulate the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North (Catherine McKinnell) on introducing the debate and on her excellent informative and powerful speech. I congratulate HeadEducationUK and the Shaw Mind Foundation for securing more than 100,000 signatures—the first time a mental health charity has achieved that level of support on the petition website. I also congratulate other hon. Members and my right hon. and hon. Friends on their informed and powerful contributions to what has been a consensual and broadly united debate about some important and far-reaching issues.

The mental health of our children is a key priority for the Government. We want all children to have the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to develop into confident and happy members of society. In our manifesto, the Prime Minister set out a commitment to publish a Green Paper on children and young people's mental health by the end of the year. The Department of Health and the Department for Education have been working together on the Green Paper to achieve a step change in the way we support the improvement of children and young people's mental health.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), who I congratulate on a moving speech, that the Green Paper will be bold. It will look at the roles of health and education in supporting the mental health of children and young people, how we can prevent mental illness from occurring and how we ensure that children and young people receive the right treatment in the right place at the right time. I confirm to hon. Members that evidence and recommendations from the joint report of the Education and Health Committees have informed the proposals in the Green Paper. I thank all members of those Committees for their work in producing that report.

A child's attainment at school is linked to their mental health and wellbeing. We are determined to improve both by ensuring that children with mental health issues

are given all the support required to allow them to focus on their education. Schools can play a key role in how they teach about the importance of mental health and in the prevention and identification of concerns. The hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne North raised the issue of exam stress. Good teaching is one of the most important factors in helping pupils to achieve. Academic success is important and good headteachers know that positive wellbeing is necessary to support that achievement. Schools should encourage pupils to work hard, but not at the expense of their wellbeing. We have removed incentives for things that add to stress, such as the culture of multiple exam resits. We are helping schools to spot mental health problems through programmes such as mental health first aid training, and through resources such as the MindEd website, funded jointly by the Department of Health and the Department for Education, which has resources and information on mental health for adults working with children and young people.

We recognise that, as been said a number of times in the debate, teachers are not mental health professionals. When more serious problems occur, schools and colleges should expect the pupil to have additional support from elsewhere, including professionals working in specialist children and young people's mental health services, voluntary organisations and local GP practices. To help with that, the Department ran pilots to look at how joint working between health and education could be improved by having single points of contact in schools and in mental health services. The evaluation found that the pilots led to increased satisfaction with working relationships, improved knowledge and awareness of mental health issues among school leads, and improved timeliness and appropriateness of referrals.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) asked about the future of the pilots. We are extending them to up to 1,200 more schools and colleges in 20 additional clinical commissioning group areas. Our survey, "Supporting mental health in schools and colleges", found that 73% of schools and colleges provide specific lessons to help to promote positive mental health and that 64% of schools and colleges report that the promotion of young people's mental health and wellbeing is integrated in the school day.

**Robert Halfon:** Is the Minister referring to the pilots of 1,200 schools that were announced by the former Children's Minister, Mr Timpson, when he gave evidence to the Select Committees, or is it another tranche of 1,200 schools on top of that?

**Nick Gibb:** It is the same point that Ed Timpson made at that Committee, but it is important for this debate that we are extending those pilots to 1,200 more schools and colleges in 20 additional clinical commissioning group areas.

As well as the role of the wider teaching staff, many schools have staff with more specific roles in relation to mental health. Around half of schools and colleges have a dedicated lead for mental health; more than two thirds of schools have a designated member of staff responsible for linking with specialist mental health services; and 87% of institutions reported that they had a plan or policy in place for supporting pupils with identified mental health needs.

Evidence shows that a whole-school approach, established with a commitment from senior leadership and supported by external expertise, is essential to a school's success in tackling mental health. A whole-school approach involves the work of all staff and students, with clear links to school policies, for example on behaviour, and a culture and atmosphere that promote good mental health. Tom Bennett's review of behaviour in schools found that a consistently applied whole-school policy, with clear systems of rewards and sanctions, was key to securing good behaviour. He argued for the importance of a whole-school culture that is effectively communicated to all staff and pupils and stated that the best behaviour policies balance a culture of discipline with strong pastoral support. The combination of clear boundaries and known sanctions for poor behaviour with a caring atmosphere is fundamental to promoting good behaviour and wellbeing for all pupils.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow suggested a study of the impact of social media on children's mental health. We are working closely with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on the internet safety strategy, which includes working on online safety with experts, social media companies, tech firms, charities, mental health practitioners and young people. I am sure that that work will highlight gaps in the evidence, as he suggested.

My right hon. Friend also asked when we would next publish a survey on children's mental health. The Department of Health has commissioned a new survey that will examine the prevalence of mental health and wellbeing problems among children and young people nationally. The new prevalence survey will enable us to make comparisons with the prevalence recorded in the 2004 survey and will be published in 2018.

A number of hon. Members asked about Ofsted's role in helping to deliver these objectives in our schools. Under the current inspection framework, inspectors reach a graded judgment on pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare and consider their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. We will work with Ofsted on any implications that arise from mandatory relationships education and relationships and sex education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) raised the important issue of mental health and children in care. The forthcoming Green Paper will consider how to improve support for vulnerable children and young people, including children in care. This includes ways of improving access to support, better joint working among services and improved training for professionals. An expert working group has been established to look at ways of improving support and care for children and young people in care; it will report shortly and we will fully consider all its recommendations. We will pilot new approaches that draw on the group's findings to improve the quality of mental health assessments for looked-after children.

**Dr Cameron:** Will the report also consider transition from child services to adult services? Transition is a crucial time: young people who may previously have received services often fall through the gaps and do not get the continuation of care that they need.

**Nick Gibb:** The hon. Lady raises an important point that will be considered in the Green Paper that we will publish shortly.

[Nick Gibb]

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Hertfordshire (Sir Oliver Heald) raised peer-to-peer counselling. One of the pilots that we have just launched relates to peer-to-peer support for children and young people with mental health. We are working with the Anna Freud Centre on it, and have just invited interested schools and colleges to apply. The programme is being independently evaluated so that we can share its findings with other schools and colleges when the pilot ends in 2019.

We want to provide all young people with a curriculum that ensures that they are prepared for adult life in modern Britain. Most schools already use their curriculum and school day to support pupil wellbeing, for example through the personal, social and health and economic education curriculum and a range of extracurricular activities. Good schools establish an ethos, curriculum and behaviour policy that teaches children about the importance of healthy, respectful and caring relationships. The Government want to ensure that all children receive a high-quality education in that respect. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires the Secretary of State for Education to impose a statutory duty on all primary schools to teach relationships education and on all secondary schools to teach relationships and sex education. The Act also gives the Government the power, which we will consider carefully, to make PSHE a compulsory subject in all schools.

A thorough engagement process will be undertaken to determine what schools should teach with respect to these subjects. We will say more about that process shortly; we announced today that Ian Bauckham, an experienced headteacher, will lead that work. We are also carefully considering what support schools may need to adapt to changes and improve provision. I can confirm that relationships education will focus on teaching pupils about different types of relationships and the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, both online and offline, which will help pupils to understand their own and others' relationships and their impact on mental health and wellbeing. That knowledge will support pupils to make good decisions and keep themselves safe and happy.

When considering how to teach these issues in schools, we need to look at what the evidence says. To help with this, the Department is undertaking a programme of randomised controlled trials to assess the effectiveness of school-based interventions to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We are also exploring, through pilots, how pupils can support each other with their mental wellbeing. The aim of these trials is to determine whether approaches such as mindfulness are effective and to make information available to any school that might be considering offering such interventions. Of course, it is equally important that we identify approaches that are not effective.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) asked about teacher training. Our randomised controlled trials include two international mental health programmes—Youth Aware of Mental Health, and the mental health and high school curriculum guide—and programmes that link physical and mental health through exercise, activities and routines. Those evidence-based approaches will ensure that schools can provide the right support to children and young people.

The Prime Minister has committed to a range of other activities with regard to children and young people's mental health. The "Supporting Mental Health in Schools and Colleges" survey showed that 90% of institutions offered at least some training to staff in supporting pupils' mental health and wellbeing, and that in most cases that training was compulsory. To support school staff further, the Department of Health is funding a mental health first-aid training offer for every primary and secondary school in England. That training, which 1,000 schools should receive by the end of the year, will help teachers to identify and support pupils with mental health issues as early as possible.

The Government have also committed to tackling the effect that bullying can have on mental health. The Department for Education and the Government Equalities Office are providing £4.6 million of funding over two years to support 10 projects to help schools prevent and tackle bullying. These include projects that target the bullying of particular groups, such as those who have special educational needs and disabilities and those who are victims of hate-related bullying; a project to report bullying online; and projects specifically to prevent and respond to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools.

We are committed to supporting the positive mental health of teachers, in particular by alleviating the workload pressures that teachers tell us have an impact on their mental health and wellbeing. We have worked extensively with unions, teachers, headteachers and Ofsted to challenge practices, such as triple or dialogic marking, that create unnecessary workload. As a consequence of this work, we established three independent review groups to address the priorities emerging from our 2014 workload challenge: ineffective marking, use of planning and resources, and data management. Work is progressing to meet all the commitments set out in the action plan published alongside the 2016 teacher workload survey, and we remain open to other ways in which the mental health of wellbeing of teachers can be supported.

As I said, my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex raised the issue of teacher training. We have strengthened initial teacher training, ensuring that teacher standards include the requirement for trainees to understand mental health and wellbeing. The Department's 2017 provision survey found that 90% of schools and colleges offered staff training on mental health.

I hope hon. Members are reassured that improving and protecting the mental health of young people remains a key priority for the Government. In 2015 we allocated £1.4 billion over five years for children and young people's mental health.

**Sir Nicholas Soames:** I am sorry to intervene on the Minister so late in his winding-up speech, but may I ask him to give the House an assurance that the very complex roll-out of all these new schemes will be properly co-ordinated, so that delivery throughout the system is even? It is often difficult to see that happening when new schemes are introduced, so I will be grateful if the Minister ensures it does this time.

**Nick Gibb:** My right hon. Friend raises a very important issue, details of which will be set out in the Green Paper that will be published shortly. The purpose of the various pilots is to ensure that we have an evidence base,

so that interventions that we make in the future are effective and deliver what we all want, which is a generation of young people who are secure in their mental health and able to identify and deal with mental health issues as they arise.

I was talking about mental health spending, which has been increased to record levels by this Government, with 2016-17 seeing a record £11.4 billion being spent, with a further £1 billion planned by 2020-21. That clearly highlights the importance that the Government place on mental health and wellbeing in this country.

Crucially, we can see that mental health is already a key priority for schools themselves. The commitment that we have made to making relationships education and RSE compulsory in all schools, and to considering the case for doing the same for PSHE, will further ensure that pupil wellbeing is supported in our schools. That sits alongside the wide range of other activity to support schools that I have set out today, and I hope that reassures right hon. and hon. Members of the Government's absolute commitment to this vital agenda for children and young people.

7.11 pm

**Catherine McKinnell:** I thank those who initiated this petition, because this has been an important, timely and high-level debate on this subject. Right hon. and hon. Members have made powerful contributions today, and I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) for his very powerful testimony, not only about his own experience but about how that applies to a very practical approach to how we can do better for our young people and for our society in addressing this issue.

I appreciate the length of the Minister's reply and the response that he gave to the variety of issues that were raised. There is a huge amount of cross-party consensus that we need to do things better and we need to see change. I will look out for the Green Paper and the proposals in it, and I know that the excellent organisations that initiated this debate—HeadEducationUK and others—and the right hon. and hon. Members in Westminster Hall today will also look out for the Green Paper, to ensure that we get this matter right, that we address the issues, that we improve our education offer, that we remove the stigma around talking about mental health, and that we adopt a cross-sectoral approach, so that our health service is there to provide the professional support that must be available and that will match our provision within the education sector.

Personally, I would like to see a really bold message coming from the Government in the Green Paper that this issue has parity of esteem, and that we do not only talk about supporting better mental health within our education system but that the Government will take the steps to ensure that it is a priority and is delivered. All right hon. and hon. Members here today will hold the Government to account on that issue.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered e-petition 176555 relating to mental health education in schools.

7.14 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

*Monday 6 November 2017*

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Local Authority Publicity Code

**The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Sajid Javid):** I issued the London Boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest with a written notice, on 2 December 2016, of a direction that I proposed to give requiring that both councils comply with the provisions in the March 2011 code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. This code restricts the frequency of publication of council newspapers, to no more often than quarterly (except for parish councils, who should not issue council newspapers more often than monthly).

I can now tell the House that I have carefully considered representations of both councils, together with other information available about both councils' publicity, the responses received to the Government's 2013 consultation "Protecting the Independent Press from Unfair Competition", and the Government's response to that consultation. I have also had careful regard to the Department's equality statement on enforcing the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity, and have considered afresh representations that both councils have made about proposals to direct their compliance with the code to restrict the frequency of publication of its newspapers. I have concluded that it would be lawful and necessary in all the circumstances of Hackney and Waltham Forest to now issue the directions as I had proposed.

As such, in accordance with my powers under section 4A(1), (2) and (3) of the Local Government Act 1986, I have today directed the London Boroughs of Hackney and Waltham Forest, in order to secure the councils' compliance with the requirements of the code, as follows:

to commission or publish no more than four issues of their respective newspapers (Hackney Today and Waltham Forest News), or any equivalent newsletter, newsheet or similar communication, in the period of one year commencing 6 February 2018, and in subsequent years; and

to ensure that the executive of both councils within 14 days of the date of the direction will take the necessary decisions in order that the councils will be in a position to comply with the requirement on publication from 6 February 2018 onwards.

I will be placing in the Library of the House copies of both directions, the letters to both councils setting out my reasons, the equality statement, and the representations of both councils.

[HCWS226]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture and Fisheries Council (October)

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** I represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council on 9 October in Luxembourg.

The Council opened with an exchange of views on Baltic Sea fishing opportunities. Council agreed to consider

EU-wide issues surrounding fishing for eels at the December Agriculture and Fisheries Council, and catch quotas in the Baltic Sea were agreed.

The Council discussed EU-Norway annual fishing consultations for 2018, and there was widespread support for the Commission's aim to seek a balanced deal with Norway. The UK raised the issue of overreliance on EU stocks, such as blue whiting, in previous agreements on the exchange of fishing opportunities with Norway.

An exchange of views was held ahead of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) meeting on 14 November in Marrakech.

The Council discussed the implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Member states supported the sustainable development goals and the role of agriculture in achieving them, but agreed on the importance of exploring vehicles other than the Common Agricultural Policy to achieve the goals.

The Commission gave a presentation updating Council on the market situation in EU agricultural sectors. The Council then discussed the ongoing trade negotiations with Mercosur countries. The UK, alongside several other member states, struck a supportive tone, welcoming progress on the trade agenda while recognising the need to be cautious on certain sectors.

A number of other items were discussed under "any other business":

The Commission updated Council on the implementation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.

Commissioner Andriukaitis gave a read out of the recent Fipronil conference in Brussels.

The German delegation drew the Council's attention to the importance of the financing of the EU minor use co-ordination facility (EUMUCF).

The Hungarian and Lithuanian delegations presented the joint declaration of Visegrad group, and the Latvia and Lithuania from the Baltic states on the prospects of the post-2020 Common Agricultural Policy.

The Austrian delegation informed Council on farming in the Alps.

The Spanish delegation updated Council on the proceedings opened by the US authorities against the import of black table olives from Spain.

The Maltese delegation presented the conclusions of the 41st conference of directors of EU paying agencies.

The Maltese delegation presented the conclusions of the informal meeting of directors for rural development.

The German delegation presented to Council on sustainable and deforestation free supply chains.

On 23 June 2016, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS225]

### Environment Council (October)

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** I attended the EU Environment Council in Luxembourg on 13 October.

Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, also attended.

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

*The effort sharing regulation (ESR) and land use, land use change and forestry regulation (LULUCF)*

The effort sharing regulation (ESR) and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) regulation, alongside the EU emissions trading system, will implement the EU's 2030 emissions reduction target under the Paris agreement.

The Estonian presidency and the Commission called for a swift and ambitious deal so that the EU could demonstrate progress in implementing the Paris agreement ahead of the 23rd Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP23) in November. On the ESR, member states remained split on the proposed size of the safety reserve of 100 million tonnes (Mt) of carbon dioxide equivalent put forward by the presidency to address concerns from some member states on the starting point for the 2021-2030 emissions trajectory. The UK and other like-minded member states expressed their desire to keep the size of the reserve as small as possible. After a full table round, the presidency concluded that there was support for the text. However, it put forward a new proposal including an increase to the safety reserve to 115 Mt and a small targeted adjustment to the 2021 emission allocation for two member states (Latvia and Malta).

On the LULUCF regulation the majority of delegations were in a position to support the text as drafted, with a number of delegations sympathetic to the presidency and Commission's desire to find a solution that would take into account the special circumstances of forest-rich member states. The high ambition group of member states including the UK reinforced the need for caution and reiterated the need to protect the overarching environmental integrity of the regulation. This included pushing to limit the size of managed forest land flexibility. The group also opposed a request for deforestation emissions to be compensated. The presidency proposed a compromise text removing any suggestion that there should be compensation for deforestation. There was a limited increase of 10 Mt in the compensation available to Finland under certain conditions, to recognise the challenges facing the most heavily forested member state.

A general agreement was reached on both pieces of legislation with most member states voting in favour. The presidency announced that the first trilogue with the European Parliament would take place on 19 October.

*Adoption of Council conclusions on the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3)*

The Council adopted conclusions on the European Union priorities for the third meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-3) in Nairobi on 4 to 6 December 2017, on the theme of pollution. The conclusions emphasise the links between pollution and health; underline the need for changes in the way our societies produce and consume goods and services; call for integrated action and co-operation between nations, the business sector and civil society; and look forward to the adoption of an "ambitious, concise and action-oriented ministerial declaration".

*Adoption of Council conclusions on the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP23)*

The Council adopted conclusions on the Paris agreement and preparations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings in Bonn on 6 to 17 November 2017 (COP23). The conclusions set out the continued momentum of climate action; a clear desire to make progress on technical negotiations on the Paris agreement rulebook; an expectation for an inclusive facilitative dialogue that will lead to a raising of ambition in 2019-20, and the need for progress on climate action in other international fora.

*AOB items*

The following items were discussed under Any Other Business.

*Reports on recent international meetings*

The presidency and Commission updated Council on several recent international meetings:

Sixth session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOP 6) to the convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters (Aarhus Convention), (Budva, Montenegro, 11-13 September 2017);

Joint high-level segment under the Meetings of the Parties to the Aarhus Convention and its protocol on PRTRs, (Budva, Montenegro, 14 September 2017);

Third session of the Meeting of the Parties (MOPP 3) to the protocol on pollutant release and transfer registers, (Budva, Montenegro, 15 September 2017);

First meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Minamata convention on Mercury (COP 1), (Geneva, 24-29 September 2017); and the

13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP 13), (Ordos, China, 6-16 September 2017).

*A more transparent, more effective and safer assessment of chemical substances*

The French, Italian and Luxembourg delegations presented information to Council on a more transparent, more effective and safer assessment of chemical substances. They also called for a strategy for a general reduction of exposure to chemicals to ensure a high level of environmental and human health protection.

*China Europe Water Platform (CEWP) High Level Conference*

The Commission updated Council on the China-Europe Water Platform High-Level Conference (Turku, Finland, 21-22 September 2017).

*The importance of good co-ordination and coherence of integrated national energy and climate plans for the implementation of the Paris agreement*

The Luxembourg delegation presented information to Council on the importance, for the implementation of the Paris agreement, of good co-ordination and coherence between the integrated national energy and climate plans for 2030 and the long-term emission reduction strategies, as well as of minimum quality, comparability and transparency standards.

*Fiftieth session of the international seminar "Science for Peace the World Over"*

The Polish delegation updated Council on the 50th session of the international seminar "Science for Peace the World Over" (Erice, Italy, 18-24 August 2017).

*Ratification of the Kigali amendment to the Montreal protocol*

The United Kingdom delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation, encouraged member states who are in a position to do so to ratify the Kigali amendment to the Montreal protocol by the 30th anniversary Meeting of the Parties to the protocol in Montreal this November, in order to demonstrate leadership on this issue. This was supported by another member state and the Commission. The amendment will come into force in 2019 as long as at least 20 countries have ratified by then.

On 23 June 2016, the EU referendum took place and the people of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union. Until exit negotiations are concluded, the UK remains a full member of the European Union and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. During this period the Government will continue to negotiate, implement and apply EU legislation. The outcome of these negotiations will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future once the UK has left the EU.

[HCWS224]



# Petition

Monday 6 November 2017

## OBSERVATIONS

### FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

#### The Rohingya in Myanmar

*The petition of residents of the UK,*

Declares that urgent action should be taken to stop the violence against Myanmar's Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya i.e. genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity; further that the petitioners cannot continue to watch the beheading of babies and children, gang rapes, and the displacement of hundreds and thousands as a genocide unfolds; further to impose conditions or sanctions on trade with Myanmar; further that Aung San Suu Kyi be stripped of her Nobel Peace Prize; further to ensure the UK does not supply arms or military training to the military; further to bring the perpetrators to the international court of justice for crimes against humanity; further to send a UN peacekeeping force to Rakhine state (Myanmar); further to establish safe haven areas within Rakhine state to stop the mass forced exodus; further to stop any arms getting to Burma junta (arms embargo); further to implement the Rakhine commission recommendations chaired by ex UN secretary Kofi Annan; further to allow in UN observers, humanitarian aid charities (British and others) and journalists; further to send emergency aid to all victims and refugees in neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh; further that it is time for the Foreign Minister to ensure that there is not a repeat of Srebrenica or Rwanda.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to issue an urgent statement calling for an immediate end to all violence in Myanmar; and further calling for immediate entry of aid into Myanmar (which has been suspended).

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Eleanor Smith, *Official Report*, 14 September 2017; Vol. 628, c. 1084.]

[P002061]

*Observations from the Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field):*

We are deeply concerned by violence against the Rohingya. The disproportionate security response to the attacks by Rohingya militants has led to a humanitarian crisis, with over 608,000 Rohingya fleeing to Bangladesh since 25 August. This looks like ethnic cleansing; we need to see these people able to return to their homes in Burma safely. Any judgement on whether crimes under international law have been committed, such as genocide, is a matter for international courts, not Governments or NGOs to determine. The UK continues to call for an end to the violence, and to prevent escalation, irrespective of whether incidents fit the definition of specific international crimes.

We have raised our concerns both internationally and bilaterally. The Foreign Secretary convened a meeting of foreign ministers at the UN on 18 September and called for (a) an end to the violence, (b) full humanitarian access, (c) access for the UN Fact Finding Mission,

(d) a swift return for refugees, and (e) rapid implementation of Kofi Annan's Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations.

We have led international efforts on Rakhine including by raising Burma three times at the UN Security Council (UNSC). The Security Council discussed Burma in public on 28 September, and called for the Burmese authorities to stop the violence and allow humanitarian access and the return of refugees. We continue to discuss further action at the UNSC.

At the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in September, the UK supported a decision to extend to September 2018 the mandate of the UN Fact-Finding Mission, to look into serious human rights concerns in Rakhine. Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Lord Ahmad, made a statement at the UN Human Rights Council on 11 September which made clear the UK strongly condemned the violence, and called on all parties to de-escalate tensions and address the humanitarian crisis.

We also raise our concerns bilaterally: the Foreign Secretary spoke with State Counsellor, Aung San Suu Kyi on 7 and 14 September and on 21 October. I met her on 27 September in Burma and reiterated the same messages. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi made clear in her 19 September and 12 October speeches the right of those who had left for Bangladesh to return.

The decision to authorise UN Peace Keeping Missions is made by the UN Security Council, with the agreement of all its members. We judge the Security Council would be unlikely to agree to do this.

The latest violence emphasises the importance of addressing the underlying issues in Rakhine. In September 2016, Aung San Suu Kyi set up the Rakhine Advisory Commission headed by former Secretary General Kofi Annan, to look into the issues affecting Rakhine. Its report published in August 2017 made recommendations which aim to alleviate the living conditions and improve the services available to all those who live in Rakhine State. The UK recognises that implementation of its recommendations is only the start of resolving the long-term problems in Rakhine. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has appointed a ministerial committee to oversee implementation and we have offered our support to improve living conditions and citizenship for all communities, particularly those who face severe discrimination such as the Rohingya.

The UK has not been training the Burmese army. This is prohibited under the EU Arms Embargo which we continue to support. The UK was instrumental in the renewal of this measure earlier this year. We also announced the suspension of our practical defence co-operation with Burma on 19 September until there is an acceptable resolution to the current situation in Rakhine. This co-operation consisted of educational courses focused on governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law. We welcome the US's announcement on 24 October of restrictive measures against the Burmese military, which suspend travel waivers and assistance programmes. The EU also agreed on 16 October to the suspension of all senior military visits to the EU, a review of all defence co-operation and consideration of additional measures targeted at the Burmese military should the situation not improve.

The UK is leading the way as the largest bilateral donor to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh. We have

given £30 million, matched the £5 million DEC appeal, and at a landmark international pledging conference in Geneva on 23 October, we announced an additional £12 million of funding for the Rohingya crisis, bringing the total UK contribution to the Rohingya in Bangladesh to £47 million. We are pleased to see other countries pledge more support too; a total of £254 million was pledged on the day.

We agree there should be unfettered access to UN observers, humanitarian aid charities and journalists. That is why we have regularly raised this with Burma. We welcome recent access for media and diplomats to Rakhine State; we will continue to urge the Burmese authorities and the military particularly to allow greater access urgently.

# ORAL ANSWERS

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# PETITION

Monday 6 November 2017

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No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned - and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than  
Monday 13 November 2017**

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