

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

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 29 March 2018**

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# House of Commons

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**Mr Speaker:** On today's Order Paper it is noted that, on 5 April 1918, Lieutenant-Colonel Percy Archer Clive, Grenadier Guards, Member for the Ross division of Herefordshire, was killed in action, while attached to the 1/5th Lancashire Fusiliers, at Bucquoy, France. We remember him today.

## Oral Answers to Questions

### INTERNATIONAL TRADE

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Brexit (Food and Drink Exports)**

1. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of the UK leaving the EU on food and drink exports. [904655]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** In 2017 the UK exported more than £22 billion-worth of food and drink products to the world, an increase of almost 10% on the previous year. When we leave the European Union, as we will exactly one year today, we will free UK farmers from the constraints of the common agricultural policy and provide huge opportunities for Scottish businesses in emerging markets, where demand for quality produce is high.

**Peter Grant:** Despite the brave words of the Secretary of State, he knows as well as we all do that the Scottish fresh food industry is in crisis because there is nobody to pick the fruit—his Government's policies are deterring people from coming to Scotland to work. Can he give us just one example of a country anywhere in the world that has given a guarantee that, after we leave the European Union, Scottish food exports will be treated in exactly the same way as they are in the European Union's market of half a billion people? Just one example, please.

**Dr Fox:** For produce such as salmon, our exports are almost exactly 50% European Union and 50% non-European Union. Salmon exports to Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam are up 63% in the past year.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Weetabix, the great British breakfast cereal made in Burton Latimer near Kettering, gets all its wheat from farmers within a 50-mile radius. It was a famous British brand even before we joined the EU, and it will remain a famous British brand after we leave the EU. Will not the prospects for exporting more Weetabix be enhanced once we leave?

**Dr Fox:** Our exports are largely determined by the growth of markets, and the International Monetary Fund says that 90% of global growth in the next 10 to 15 years will be outside the European continent. That is where the big possibilities for UK exporters are, including in food and drink.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister's colleagues are fond of talking about pork markets in China, but I urge him to pay attention to the potential pulses market there. The British Edible Pulses Association is keen to export faba beans to China, but the Department for International Trade is not talking to the BEPA at the moment. The Chinese want these beans, but there are some technical obstacles. I urge the Minister to respond to the correspondence and let us get this pulses market moving.

**Dr Fox:** I am keen to ensure that that market is fully exploited. If the hon. Lady wants the representatives to speak directly to one of our Ministers, we would be happy to speak to them to see whether there are any technical impediments that can be swept away.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What has been the impact of the Food is GREAT campaign?

**Dr Fox:** To get more people around the world to understand that high-quality British produce is a world beater.

#### **Brexit (Creative Industries)**

2. **Thangam Debbonaire** (Bristol West) (Lab): If he will hold discussions with the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and representatives of the creative industries on trade in that sector with EU countries after the UK leaves the EU. [R] [904656]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** Yesterday the Government announced the creative industries sector deal. With a strategy and new money committed to boost our creative industries, trade and investment is a key part of that deal. Exports are booming in the sector, with £9.6 billion in services and £2.7 billion in goods in 2015, making this country a global leader.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I thank the Minister for his answer, but the clock is ticking. Representatives of the live performance part of the creative industries tell me of their worries, based on current experience of touring theatre, dance and music outside the EU. Will he, like the DCMS Minister, the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Margot James), agree to meet representatives of the creative industries to discuss those significant challenges so that this massive growth sector of our economy can continue post-Brexit?

**Greg Hands:** My colleagues and I are always happy to meet representatives of the sector. The sector's export growth, and its activity both in the European Union and beyond, is actually growing. Only 34% of the sector's total global exports are to the EU. A huge amount is already being done outside the EU and, when it comes to things like music, DIT has committed to

make about £3 million of grant support available to help music small and medium-sized enterprises to be able to export up to 2020.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): One of the biggest growth markets is in the film and creative industries: one of the biggest areas now, apart from Hollywood, is Bollywood in India. What relations has my right hon. Friend established to build that market up so that we can exploit opportunities with our good friends from India?

**Greg Hands:** My hon. Friend, who has impeccable trade connections with India, makes a strong point. Film, TV and broadcasting as a sector in the UK grew by 6.6% last year, and a large part of that is in co-operation with India. Total spend in the UK on film production reached a 20-year high, and global UK-qualifying films enjoyed 21% of global box office success, including a lot of success in India.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): British audiovisual exports are worth £7.4 billion a year, with more than £3 billion of that coming from trade with the EU. The industry has raised major concerns that its ability to export into the European market will be undermined, unless there is frictionless access for broadcasters and creative industries. Will the Minister reassure the sector and the House that this will be the case—or is this yet another area where the Government are failing to listen to British businesses?

**Greg Hands:** I will take no lectures from the hon. Lady on listening to British businesses, on which this Government have an impeccable record. We are seeking frictionless trade—as frictionless as possible—with the EU. We are seeking a free trade agreement of much greater scope than any before, and it will cover services—including creative industries, which are such a key part of our export offer.

### SMEs (Exports)

3. **Mark Pawsey** (Rugby) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support small and medium-sized businesses to export. [904658]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** Helping SMEs to export is a high priority for the Department, and we are working through our overseas network, through online services on great.gov.uk, which has had more than 3 million visitors, through our international trade advisers and through export finance. Last year, 79% of companies supported by UK Export Finance were SMEs. Mr Speaker, if, like Roger Federer, I can press on—albeit without the same grace—I would say that exports from the west midlands increased in value by more than 80% between 2010 and 2016.

**Mr Speaker:** The Minister knows which buttons to press.

**Mark Pawsey:** It is great news about the west midlands, but a constituent of mine who has a small business providing services around the world came to tell me about the challenges he faces in getting appropriate

banking facilities and about the need to minimise losses on currency transfers. What steps is the Department taking to make sure that UK banks provide the facilities, support and advice that SMEs need in order to export?

**Graham Stuart:** As my hon. Friend will know from running a business, and as I do from my experience, this is a challenge and a work in progress. But we have established strategic relationships with the five leading UK banks. UK Export Finance launched a partnership with those banks in October 2017 to help not only exporters, but those who supply exporters, to easily access Government-backed financial support.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister wants to talk about his experience; I recall that when he worked for a living he certainly did not work in the manufacturing sector, and nor did the Secretary of State, who worked in the health sector. I worked in the manufacturing sector, and I can tell the Minister that up and down the country SMEs are struggling to export, given that they are going to be blocked off from a 600 million market and left with a 60 million one.

**Graham Stuart:** This is a truly grim and sad time for those who want to see our departure from the EU lead to a collapse in investment and exports, as instead we have seen the exact opposite. We had record levels of foreign direct investment in this country. We have an improving climate for that and we have record numbers of exports from the hon. Gentleman's area—from Yorkshire. It is about time he put the gloom away, because the facts keep defying him.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Actually, it is £500 million less in the automotive sector. On supporting SMEs, will the Minister explain what the Government are going to do to help those businesses export to China and India? He will be aware that Germany, within the EU, exports twice as much to India as we do and four times as much within the EU as we do.

**Graham Stuart:** I am afraid the right hon. Gentleman is a member of the same club. I hate to share this with the House, but exports to China were up by 30% last year.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP) *rose—*

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There is something of an internal Scottish National party competition. I do not know whether one of them is thought to have greater seniority, but not in my mind. I call Kirsty Blackman.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Many of our small and medium-sized enterprises are involved in premium manufacturing and other forms of high-value production. Will the Minister ensure that, in discussions with the EU, those things are taken into account when negotiators are discussing origin and the calculation of origin?

**Graham Stuart:** All such issues are taken into account. Of course, the Department for Exiting the European Union leads on the negotiations on our exit from the EU.

### Future Trade Agreements

4. **Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): If he will take steps to facilitate parliamentary scrutiny of future trade agreements. [904659]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** The Government believe strongly that Parliament has a vital role to play in the scrutiny of future free trade agreements, as it always has in the past. The Government are currently in the process of designing our future trade agreement policy. No decisions have yet been taken, as stakeholder consultations are ongoing.

**Christine Jardine:** When there is a new EU trade treaty, the European Scrutiny Committee can review it and the European Parliament can veto it; when there is a new UK treaty, all this House can do is delay its ratification by 21 days. Far from taking back control, does the Minister agree with the Commons Library that post-Brexit Britain

“may be seen as diminishing democratic accountability in relation to trade treaties”?

Will he fix that by supporting the inclusion of new clause 3 in the Trade Bill?

**Greg Hands:** I will take no lessons from the Liberal Democrats in this regard. The hon. Lady voted against the Second Reading of the Trade Bill, which will allow this country to transition its 40 or more existing EU trade agreements into UK law. Those agreements have already been scrutinised in Parliament. As I say, future trade agreements will be a matter for future proposals.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Is it not the case that, under current plans, the British Government will be able to sign off UK-wide trade deals without the consent of the devolved Parliaments, meaning that the Belgian region of Wallonia will have more power over EU trade deals than Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will have over UK trade deals?

**Greg Hands:** I think the hon. Gentleman is confused. Existing trade deals have been scrutinised in this Parliament, with input from the Welsh Government in the usual way—more than 40 EU trade deals have already been scrutinised in this Parliament. He has confused those with future trade deals. We will, of course, work closely with Parliament and the devolved Administrations to make sure that their voice is heard on those future trade deals.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is important that the Minister tries to clarify this issue. Brexit is supposed to be about regaining sovereignty and taking back control, so what is actually going to happen? Are this House and the devolved Assemblies simply going to be consulted, or are they going to have to consent to new trade deals?

**Greg Hands:** Again, I think the hon. Gentleman is confusing existing trade deals, which are what the Trade Bill is all about, with the prospects for future trade deals. We have been absolutely clear on future trade deals. Trade policy is of course a reserved matter, but Ministers have engaged with the Scottish and Welsh Governments

frequently, including at official level, and we recently did a deep dive with the devolved Administrations on what future trade policy might look like.

### Education Exports

5. **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of education exports. [904660]

9. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of education exports. [904664]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** The latest statistics, released earlier this year, estimate total UK education exports and transnational education activity to have been £19.3 billion in 2015. That is an increase of 3% on the previous year and of 22% since 2010, in current prices. The Government continue to support education providers in this vital sector.

**Alberto Costa:** Many small businesses in and around my constituency either need help to begin to export or are already exporting in education and other goods and services. For example, a constituent of mine, Mr John Bowers, owns the company Bowers & Freeman, an SME that specialises in groundbreaking and innovative fasteners for the aerospace industry. What is the Department doing to ensure that SMEs such as Bowers & Freeman get the help that they need, whether in education or other goods and services sectors?

**Graham Stuart:** UK Export Finance offers competitive finance and insurance to SMEs of all sorts that want to export. My hon. Friend mentions one company in his constituency; I am pleased to say that UKEF recently provided bond support to another, Ram Universal, to help it to export its high-quality valves to India. The Government's export strategy will look at SMEs' need and design information and services appropriate to them.

**Kevin Foster:** Torbay's language schools provide a valuable source of educational exports by encouraging students from across the world to learn here. What work is the Minister's Department doing to assist them in securing trade from growing economies in Asia, as the Devon School of English recently did in Taiwan?

**Graham Stuart:** The Department for International Trade's dedicated education teams are focused on developing a pipeline of overseas opportunities that are then matched with UK providers. That is enhanced by the DIT-led English language working group, which brings representatives together from across the sector. I look forward to seeking further export opportunities in Taiwan when I visit there in a couple of weeks.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Further to the reports that education exports are worth some £19 billion annually, does the Minister have an indication of how that figure will grow as we attempt to move our eyes away from only Europe towards a greater global vision?

**Graham Stuart:** I am delighted to say, as has been discussed so often today, that exports are up—not least in the education area. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said, 90% of global growth is expected to be outside the EU. We will have a close and extremely important partnership with the EU, but the opportunities are out there, which is why he and other colleagues in this Department are so dedicated to building economic international opportunities for the country in the future.

### Tech Sector Exports

6. **Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the level of tech sector exports. [904661]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart):** Technology is at the heart of the Government's industrial strategy, placing the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence and data revolutions. Exports of telecommunication, computer and information services increased from £17.8 billion in 2015 to £19 billion in 2016. Digital goods and services overall contributed £116.5 billion to the UK's economy in 2016.

**Jeremy Quin:** “Total War” is the phenomenally successful computer game produced by Creative Assembly in my Horsham constituency and exported to 98% of all the countries on earth. Creative Assembly is brilliant at nurturing domestic talent, but it also employs workers from 34 different countries. What reassurance can the Minister give that it will continue to be able to recruit the brightest and the best?

**Graham Stuart:** Like my hon. Friend, I am enthusiastic about the development of mathematics and digital and technical education. Some £406 million extra was announced in the industrial strategy to help address a shortage in science, technology, engineering and maths skills. The creative industries sector deal was published on Tuesday, and that highlighted the Government's determination to ensure that we have the right digital skills for the future.

### Section 232 Tariffs

7. **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What assurances he has received from his counterparts in the US Administration that the section 232 tariffs imposed by that country on steel and aluminium imports will not apply to UK exports. [904662]

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** Although we welcome the United States granting an EU-wide exemption from the tariffs applied under section 232 for a limited time period, we continue to argue that this is not an appropriate mechanism to deal with justifiable concerns in relation to the overcapacity of steel worldwide.

**David Hanson:** Some 15% of UK steel goes to America, and, quite frankly, a pause on the imposition of tariffs is simply not good enough. What steps is the Secretary of State taking to make sure that that pause becomes permanent?

**Dr Fox:** We are working with the European Union to ensure a permanent exemption, and I spoke to Commissioner Malmström yesterday. On the specific case of the United Kingdom, the UK is responsible for only 1% of American steel imports. Much of that is high quality steel, which the United States does not manufacture itself. Some of our steel goes to American defence projects, which means that it would be quite absurd to exclude the United Kingdom, or to apply tariffs to the United Kingdom, on the basis of national security.

13. [904669] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): I welcome the assurance that section 232 tariffs will not apply to UK exports, but, ultimately, any tariffs will have a significant impact on prices here and could have a knock-on effect on those working in the steel industry, including in Tata Steel at Port Talbot, which neighbours my constituency. If those tariffs are implemented, what additional support will the Government provide for the industry to help deal with the damaging tariffs imposed on workers?

**Dr Fox:** The hon. Gentleman is right: there will be a knock-on price effect and there is also likely to be a displacement effect in the global steel market, for which we may have to look at imposing safeguard measures; along with the European Union, we would do so. He is also right that there would be a knock-on price effect in the United States, too. It does not make any sense to protect 140,000 steel jobs in the United States and see prices rise for the 6.5 million US workers who are dependent on steel.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for meeting steel MPs this week. Will he say a bit more about the safeguards that he will try to ensure are in place against diversionary dumping as a result of this action by the United States?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. As he knows, our aim, along with our European Union partners, is for the tariffs not to be applied in the first place. We argue that section 232 is not an appropriate means of doing so. If we want to deal with the overproduction of steel—particularly Chinese overproduction—the best way to do so is through the G7 steel forum, where there are 28 outstanding recommendations to which we are still awaiting a Chinese response.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): UK steel faces a very real threat from dumping as a result of these US tariffs, but the Conservatives in the European Parliament led the group of MEPs that consistently blocked EU action against dumping. As the Manufacturing Trade Remedies Alliance says, in the Trade Bill—which has mysteriously disappeared—the Secretary of State is proposing the weakest trade remedies system in the world. It is simply not good enough. When is he going to stand up for the UK steel industry and for UK steel jobs?

**Dr Fox:** It is hard to know where to start when there are so many wrong facts in a single question. Let us leave aside the European Parliament. It was the Labour party in this Parliament that voted against the customs Bill and the Trade Bill, stopping us creating a trade

remedies authority in the first place. The Trade Bill itself only sets up the trade remedies authority; it does not set up the regime.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are running late, but I am not having Cleethorpes and Redditch missing out. I call Martin Vickers.

### Brexit (Trade Agreements)

8. **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential economic benefits to UK businesses and consumers of securing trade agreements with non-EU countries after the UK has left the EU. [904663]

12. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential economic benefits to UK businesses and consumers of securing trade agreements with non-EU countries after the UK has left the EU. [904668]

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** As part of its preparations for future trade negotiations, the Department for International Trade has established 14 trade working groups and high-level dialogues with key trade partners beyond the EU to explore the best ways of progressing our trade and investment relationships.

**Martin Vickers:** Many businesses in my constituency, particularly in the seafood sector, are reliant on the free flow of supplies. Does the Minister share my confidence that new arrangements can be made to ensure that, particularly in the seafood sector, supplies are maintained without any undue delay?

**Greg Hands:** My hon. Friend is a passionate advocate for the fish and seafood sector in his constituency. Those sectors already contribute £1.3 billion to the UK economy. I am concerned about reports of problems at Five Star Fish in Grimsby, next door to his constituency, but I can tell him that leaving the common fisheries policy presents the opportunities to boost exports, expertise and fish-related services.

**Rachel Maclean:** Last week I visited the innovative company, Mission Resources, in Abbots Morton. It has invented the home energy resources unit, which generates energy from household waste to reduce fuel consumption, furthering climate change reduction and the Government's clean growth strategy. Given that the company is looking to expand to powerhouses such as China and India, what assurances can the Secretary of State give to my constituent about the opportunities for trade with non-EU countries?

**Greg Hands:** Over the last seven years, this Government have made significant resource investments into clean energy and renewable technologies. We have put in a huge amount of effort to ensure that those capabilities are now exportable. The UK has the world's largest offshore wind sector and quite a significant sector in resources such as solar. We need to take advantage of export opportunities, and that is where the Department for International Trade plays its role.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904671] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** My Department is responsible for foreign and outward direct investment, establishing an independent trade policy on export promotion. Yesterday I chaired the 10th UK-Brazil Joint Economic and Trade Committee, where we signed memorandums of understanding on infrastructure, innovation and trade facilitation.

**Mr Sheerman:** The Chinese Government recently turned the tap on exports of waste plastic to China. That has made a fantastic and very disturbing difference in the chemical market in Britain. If the Chinese Government did the same in higher education, what would be the impact? Has the Secretary of State done any analysis of that?

**Dr Fox:** I had discussions in China only last week about exporting UK educational expertise. There is a huge appetite for that around the world, because there is an increasing acceptance that it is the gold standard. In fact, UK exports of education last year outstripped the City of London's insurance business and continue to grow with Government support.

T2. [904672] **Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Secretary of State reassure my constituent, Simon Bainbridge, who is one of the finest producers of Northumbrian lamb, that lamb sales will not be forgotten in the new free trade agreements?

**Dr Fox:** Far from being forgotten, advocating further exports of high-quality UK produce is at the top of the Government's agenda. I can tell my hon. Friend the good news that the latest international market to open up to British lamb is Saudi Arabia, with enormous potential.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): GKN has total sales of £10.4 billion, £9 billion of which are outside the UK. Profits from its operations in 30 countries around the world are repatriated to the UK. It will not be much of a global Britain if the Secretary of State's approach is to stand idly by while a business like GKN that is so vital to our international trade is allowed to be subject to a hostile takeover that can lead only to its break-up and sale. Why has he stayed so silent on such a crucial issue for our trading prospects?

**The Minister for Trade Policy (Greg Hands):** The allegation that anybody has stood idly by is utter rot. On Monday—perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not been following the news—my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary issued an open letter to Melrose, the company that is doing the bidding, to request certain safeguards for employees, and so on, if the bid was successful. Melrose has responded, agreeing to give those very assurances. We took action on this days ago. He needs to keep up with the news.

T4. [904674] **Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): SMEs are the backbone of our economy. As a Minister, I tried to help SMEs in the security sector to export. Food and farming businesses in Lincolnshire would like to do the same, but they need encouragement, advice and support. Will the Secretary of State meet me and a small group of others to see how we can help to feed the world and make it safe too?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart)**: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's question. I would of course be delighted to meet him and colleagues to discuss food and drink, which is so important both to his constituency and mine. I am delighted to say that last year food and drink exports went up by £2 billion to £22 billion, and that, for the first time ever, we have a Department of State whose only role is to focus on the international economic interests of this nation. I will be delighted to meet him to discuss how we can do more.

T3. [904673] **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): The dumping of steel from states including China has had a detrimental impact on the steel industry in the UK. Ahead of the further dumping that is anticipated when the US tariffs come into force, Canada has announced that it will be offering extra powers for border security checks to crack down on cheap steel. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of this policy?

**Dr Fox**: I rather feel that I answered this question earlier. The EU will look to see whether we need to introduce safeguarding measures as a consequence of any diversion. We are working closely with our European partners to assess what the potential may be and what the joint EU response would need to be consequently.

T6. [904676] **Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): The Secretary of State has recently returned from Hong Kong and mainland China. Now that we are leaving the EU customs union and single market, what more trade can we do with these countries to ensure that our businesses are not left worse off?

**Dr Fox**: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that at the festival of innovation last week we had 284 UK businesses and seven universities with us, all of which were able to discuss future partnerships and sponsorships. There was a very warm welcome, and we actually began the initial discussions with the Government of Hong Kong about entering into a future trade agreement on services.

T5. [904675] **Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Given the less than successful outcome of the recent negotiations on behalf of UK fishermen, what hope and reassurances can the Secretary of State provide for farmers such as those in my constituency that future negotiations will make them better off outside the EU?

**Dr Fox**: The best hope for British farmers is to be set free from the constraints of the common agricultural policy and to start to produce for export markets. There is a huge demand out there for UK food produce.

The high standards that we have in this country, which we will maintain, are in themselves a kitemark for British produce.

**Luke Graham** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): At a recent Public Accounts Committee hearing, the permanent secretary at the Department for International Trade confirmed that although there are eight regional offices for the Department in England, there are none in Scotland. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss adequate resourcing for the DIT in Scotland?

**Dr Fox**: I met our DIT staff in Glasgow relatively recently. The point is that the Department for International Trade is a UK Department. It is there to help the trading interests, export interests and inward investment interests of the whole of the United Kingdom. Trade is a reserved matter.

T7. [904677] **Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): The north-east is a net gainer from the EU, and 60% of our exports are to EU countries, but the region is set to be worst off after Brexit. How will the Department make sure we do not lose out as part of the Government's global north vision?

**Greg Hands**: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State just said, we are working for all parts of the United Kingdom, by working with DExEU on our future trading relationships with the European Union and, as importantly, making sure that we open up trading possibilities beyond the EU. I mentioned earlier that we have 14 trade working groups working with major markets, and exports from the north-east will be right at the centre of that work.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Can the Secretary of State tell the House what he will be doing in 365 days' time?

**Dr Fox**: Watching the clock.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): The liquid gold that is Scotch whisky is a major export good for our economy, but so far in the EU negotiations we are still not getting clarity on geographical indications, which many other drinks benefit from as well. When will we get clarity on GI for Scotch whisky and other drinks that we enjoy?

**Dr Fox**: It always comes round to whisky at some point in these discussions on a Thursday morning. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the Government accepted that we would roll over the EU treaties that exist at the present time, including those on GIs. It is a pity that he voted against that in the House of Commons.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The ceramics industry stands ready to play its part in helping to boost global exports from the UK, but the reciprocal arrangement we need for that is protection from Chinese dumping of tiles and tableware. Will the Secretary of State ask his Cabinet colleagues to look favourably on the amendments that I have tabled to the customs Bill, which would ensure that the protections we currently have in Europe were written into British law?

**Dr Fox:** The hon. Gentleman is right about his amendments, but his party voted against setting up the trade remedies authority that would implement them. He cannot have it both ways.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The African continental free trade area agreement was recently signed. Will the Secretary of State assure me that economic development and fair trade will be at the heart of the free trade agreements he looks for?

**Dr Fox:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. It is very important that we tie together better than we have in the past our trade policy and our development policy. The Secretary of State for International Development and I will be making some announcements on exactly how we can do that, and we will be discussing at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting with some of the relevant trade partners exactly how we can make that happen.

**Mr Speaker:** Finally, in one short sentence without semi-colons or subordinate clauses, Wera Hobhouse.

**Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): The EU has around 60 trade agreements with third countries. How many trade agreements with those countries does the Secretary of State estimate will have been agreed by December 2020?

**Dr Fox:** We hope all of them, but that means we have to transition them into UK law, which of course the hon. Lady voted against.

## WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

*The Minister for Women and Equalities was asked—*

### STEM Degrees

1. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of trends in the number of women choosing STEM degree courses. [904678]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Amber Rudd):** I am delighted to say that the latest data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service shows that there has been a 25% increase in the number of women accepted on to full-time undergraduate science, technology, engineering and maths courses since 2010, which is significantly more than the 14% increase among men. That is good progress, but there is more to do.

**Kevin Foster:** That is superb news, and I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. Does she agree that the best way to encourage more women to study STEM subjects is via activities at school that bring them to life, such as the weekly STEM club at Torquay Girls' Grammar School?

**Amber Rudd:** I congratulate Torquay Girls' Grammar School on having those weekly meetings, which I am sure act as an inspiration for young women to take up STEM subjects. I am pleased that since 2010, we have seen an 18% increase in the number of girls taking STEM subjects at A-level.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): In order to choose STEM subjects at university, girls need to have seen what fantastic careers STEM and engineering can offer. I know that many engineering companies want to go into schools and show that, but there is no co-ordination and no signposting of how they can do that. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that there is a central point where companies and schools can come together to get engineering into girls' lives?

**Amber Rudd:** I agree with the hon. Lady that young women need to see the benefits of studying STEM subjects, because then they can see the huge range of options opening up to them in the modern world. In fact, we have an ambassadors programme, to which 30,000 ambassadors are signed up, who go into schools and provide just the sort of inspiration that is needed.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): We know that gender stereotypes are established extremely early in a child's life, so what support is the Department giving to campaigns to promote gender-neutral toys?

**Amber Rudd:** I would say that there is sufficient peer pressure to make sure that producers and manufacturers of gender-specific toys are increasingly being encouraged to think again about that, so that we can encourage young women to make sure they take seriously their career options.

### Universal Credit

2. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect of universal credit on women. [904679]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse):** It is essential that women have opportunities to enter employment and to progress in work, and universal credit is designed to give them the assistance and tools to do so. Colleagues across the Government regularly discuss the impact of policies on women, and indeed on all groups.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** We know from the Women's Budget Group that the cuts baked into universal credit—the two-child cap, the cuts to the work allowance and the benefits freeze—are having an even more detrimental impact on women than on men, so when will we see an urgent review of the gendered impact of the social security changes?

**Kit Malthouse:** The hon. Gentleman is mistaken in seeing welfare reform work in isolation from all the other assistance that has been offered to the low-paid, and in particular to women. Other measures, such as shared parental leave, the right to request flexible working, the 30 hours of free childcare and indeed the 85% of childcare funded through universal credit—or 600 hours of free childcare in Scotland—alongside the national living wage, which has given the lowest-paid their highest pay rise for 20 years, and the fact that we are taking millions out of tax by raising the personal allowance, offering training and assistance, and reducing the gender

pay gap all point towards and have created the highest employment levels for women, at 70.9%, that this great and glorious country has ever seen.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Is there evidence that the existence of in-work benefits disproportionately depresses female wages?

**Kit Malthouse:** My right hon. Friend often emerges from the forest to ask difficult and challenging questions, as he has now done to me for the second time this week. I am not aware that there is such evidence, but I am happy to go away and research it, and I will write to him if there is any.

**Mr Speaker:** I ask the Minister to place a copy of his reply in the Library, because we will all be greatly interested in it.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): The Government claim that their universal credit alternative payment regime allows partners to apply for split payments in exceptional circumstances. However, few women are aware of this option, and 85% of domestic abuse survivors who contacted Women's Aid have said that applying for split payments would anger their partners. Does the Minister agree with me that this should be mandatory, with payments split from day one?

**Kit Malthouse:** We are obviously very sensitive to the issue of domestic abuse, which is completely unacceptable in any circumstances. Work coaches in jobcentres are specifically trained to identify situations in which domestic abuse may be occurring and to offer options and assistance to people subjected to it, including alternative payments. We do not currently see the need for default split payments, because the current benefits system does not operate in that way, and a number of benefits are paid into joint accounts. However, we are aware that the SNP Government are working on an alternative, and we are happy to work with them on that in Scotland and to see how it goes.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I will, if I may, push the Minister slightly more on that. We know that many women are prevented from accessing money because they are in abusive and controlling relationships. Given that, did the Government not give any consideration to the consequences for these women when they made the decision to put universal credit into a single bank account?

**Kit Malthouse:** We very obviously did consider that, which is why we created the alternative payment method. The current benefits system does not operate on a split payment basis, and we have not yet seen any evidence, in areas where universal credit has been rolled out, that the current system is exacerbating the situation. We firmly believe in our policy on domestic violence and abuse—the Government have made a significant commitment to that—and legislation on a comprehensive plan will come out later this year. We are not convinced that the benefits system is the way to solve domestic abuse, albeit we need to identify, in particular, women who are subjected to it and signpost them to the right kind of assistance, accommodating them in the system if we can. We do not think that doing this on a default basis is the correct approach at the moment.

### BBC: Gender Pay Equality

3. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If she will discuss gender pay equality with the BBC. [904680]

**The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins):** The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries and I will discuss pay equality with the BBC. We are clear that the BBC, as a public service broadcaster that is funded by the licence fee, has a responsibility to set an example on pay and other equality measures in the workplace. Getting that right is important for licence fee payers, as well as for all the talented women who work at the BBC.

**Mr Hollobone:** Even more disgraceful than its continued pro-remain Brexit coverage is the way in which the BBC discriminates against female employees. Will my hon. Friend invite the director-general into her office for an interview without coffee to make it quite clear that this continued maltreatment of female employees must stop immediately?

**Victoria Atkins:** We are in the process of arranging exactly such a meeting, but I must confess that I have not yet put my mind to our precise hospitality arrangements.

**Mr Speaker:** Very important!

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): Words are clearly not enough, so what steps are being taken to enforce gender pay equality in the BBC, as it seems that previous discussions on the issue have been supremely unsuccessful?

**Victoria Atkins:** We are clear that it is against the law to pay women differently when they do the same work as men, and that has been the law for some 40 years. The deadline for the gender pay gap data is next Wednesday, and large employers such as the BBC must have published their data by then. This is precisely about drawing open those areas where women are not being treated as fairly by their employers as men.

### Taylor Review: Pregnancy and Maternity Discrimination

4. **Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to implement the recommendations of the Taylor review of modern working practices on strengthening legislation on pregnancy and maternity discrimination. [904681]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):** As we said in the Government's response to the Matthew Taylor review, we will update and consolidate pregnancy and maternity discrimination guidance on gov.uk this summer. We will also review statutory redundancy protection for pregnant women and new mothers, and consider whether it is sufficient.

**Danielle Rowley:** The Government have twice, and perhaps now three times, committed to review legislative protection against unfair redundancy for pregnant women and new mothers. When will that review be published, and do the Government still intend to consider the legislative options recommended in the report by the Women and Equalities Committee?

**Andrew Griffiths:** We have stated that the review of the legislation on redundancy protection will consider that issue and report within a year. I recognise that this is a serious matter and I am trying to turbocharge the process to ensure that we report sooner. I reassure the hon. Lady that we take the recommendations of the Committee very seriously, and all options are open.

**Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con):** The Minister knows that pregnant women deserve better—I know he is about to become a dad, so this is a very personal issue for him. It is estimated that about 54,000 women a year are dismissed or made redundant, or feel that they have no choice but to leave their jobs, and that is not good enough. Much of this is cloaked in secrecy because of the use of non-disclosure agreements to withhold information about potentially unlawful acts of dismissing women when they are pregnant. I hope that the Minister will put NDAs on his list of things to consider when he reviews the legislation, as he has generously promised to do.

**Andrew Griffiths:** My right hon. Friend is right: the Griffiths household is waiting with bated breath—it is days before the next Griffiths generation appears on the planet.

I thank my right hon. Friend for the advice that the Committee has given me since I have had ministerial responsibility for this issue. Discriminating against women in the workplace because they are pregnant or new mothers is unlawful, and the Government are determined to stamp it out. She raises the issue of NDAs, and that topical and serious matter is at the top of my agenda.

**Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD) rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** The same bated breath may be expected to be detected in the Swinson-Hames household.

**Jo Swinson:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wish the Minister well with his impending arrival. In addition to my obvious interest in this question, I remind the House of my former role as chair of the charity Maternity Action.

It is now two years since the Government published research by the Equality and Human Rights Commission that I commissioned as a Minister back in 2013. That research showed that one in 25 pregnant women felt forced to leave their jobs because health and safety risks are not addressed. It is more than time for concrete action to tackle that, so will the Minister bring forward legislation to give pregnant women a clear right to paid leave if their employer cannot, or will not, provide a safe working environment?

**Andrew Griffiths:** I thank the hon. Lady for her work in this area and wish her the best of luck with her impending arrival. Health and Safety Executive guidance helps employers to meet their health and safety obligations towards pregnant women and new mothers. Working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, we have delivered several presentations to partnerships to share good practice, but she is absolutely right that we need to do more. I understand her point, and while I cannot commit to the request she makes today, we are certainly considering all options in this area.

## Gender Pay Gap: Action Plans

5. **Laura Pidcock (North West Durham) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure companies produce action plans to reduce their gender pay gap. [904682]

9. **Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure companies produce action plans to reduce their gender pay gap. [904686]

11. **Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** What steps the Government are taking to ensure companies produce action plans to reduce their gender pay gap. [904689]

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Amber Rudd):** Last year we introduced groundbreaking regulations requiring employers to publish gender pay gap data. Reporting is an important first step, but what matters now is that employers actually take action. While this is not mandatory, we strongly encourage employers to publish a plan alongside their figures.

**Laura Pidcock:** It is clear from the most recent figures that the requirement on companies to publish pay data is not making a material difference to women's pay. With the gender pay gap at 18.4% and a quarter of a million women paid less than the national minimum wage, does the Minister agree that the Government are all talk and no action on pay equality, and that to achieve pay parity we need much tougher measures?

**Amber Rudd:** The gender pay gap, although completely unwelcome, is at the lowest level that we have ever seen. It is actually 9%, and the gender pay gap reporting that we have now mandated will help to drive that down. We are already seeing it very much as part of people's conversations and I think we will see a material difference.

**Karen Lee:** The response to the Government's gender pay audit has been slow, and global banks have revealed gender pay gaps as high as 60%. Does the Minister agree that, as Labour has proposed, companies should prove that they are taking timely action to close their pay gaps—apparently it takes a year to turbocharge something—or face a substantial Government fine?

**Amber Rudd:** I share the hon. Lady's outrage at some of the sizes of the gender pay gaps, but I feel that that just gives even more weight to the fact that it was absolutely right to bring forward last year's legislation. Revealing pay gaps is exactly how we will start to get proper action.

**Paula Sherriff:** What assessment has the Minister made of recent gender pay gap analysis showing that multi-academy trusts have some of the worst gender pay gaps in the UK?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady will be aware that multi-academy trusts are also covered by this requirement. We will see their reporting, which is taking place right now, and we will then assess what the consequences are, and whether additional action or influence is needed to ensure that improvements are made.

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): What sanctions are available if companies fail to meet their legal obligations to help to close the gender pay gap?

**Amber Rudd:** What is the law is that gender pay gap reporting takes place. The EHRC has the ability to take measures that can end up with fines and further sanctions. In terms of proposals for companies to actually close the gap themselves, we encourage them to put forward their own plans.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): Two weeks ago, I met senior managers at the BBC and discussed the gender pay gap. It is right that the BBC continues to attract talent, but has the Minister determined whether the gender pay gap at the BBC is due to men being overpaid or women being underpaid?

**Amber Rudd:** The BBC certainly has a case to answer. We are aware, because it has disclosed this, that some senior male members of the BBC have addressed that by taking pay cuts. What really matters to us here, however, is that we get pay equality.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): I congratulate the Government on commencing the Labour party's legislation—section 78 of the Equality Act 2010—that requires companies to report on the gender pay gap. Does the Minister agree with Labour Members that reporting is not enough if we want to close the gender pay gap? We need mandatory action plans for companies and sanctions.

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for congratulating the Government on doing something that Labour failed to do for 13 years. I am pleased that she welcomes the good responses that we are getting from companies in both the public and private sectors, but there is obviously more to do. I want to make sure that companies actually take action as a result. When we discuss this with them, they say that they will do that.

### Diets During Pregnancy

6. **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Government will take steps to adopt a cross-departmental approach to improving women's diets during pregnancy. [904683]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** The Government are very keen to work collaboratively to help everyone to improve their diet, including women during pregnancy. Dietary guidance for women before, during and after pregnancy is available on NHS Choices and Start4Life, and via health professionals.

**Mr Sheerman:** Even with my large number of children and grandchildren, I am sure that the hon. Lady knows more about this than I do, but it is essential that pregnant women have a healthy and sensible diet. The approach on the ground is not joined up. Local authorities' health education budgets have been under-resourced, and there is no join-up between health education and the other players.

**Caroline Dinéage:** The hon. Gentleman is, of course, a father and a grandfather to many, so he knows an enormous amount about this. He is absolutely right

that co-ordination across the piece is absolutely vital. It is also vital that we help to protect the less advantaged to make sure that everyone is able to have the healthy diet that they need during their pregnancies. That is why we have the Healthy Start programme, which helps hundreds of thousands of pregnant women, families and children under four who live in low-income households to sustain a healthy diet.

### Caste (Equality Act)

7. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): When the Government plan to respond to the consultation on caste as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. [904684]

**The Minister for Women (Victoria Atkins):** The Government's consultation on how best to ensure that there is appropriate and proportionate legal protection against caste discrimination received more than 16,000 responses. This demonstrates how important the matter is to some groups and communities. We are analysing the responses and will respond in due course.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank my hon. Friend for her answer, but she failed to report that the consultation ended last September, meaning that the Government have had nearly six months to consider the huge weight of responses. I urge her to get on with the work, given the level of response, and to deal with this through the statute book once and for all, as is demanded by thousands of Hindu citizens across the country.

**Victoria Atkins:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. He has been an ardent campaigner on this point, not least, I suspect, because so many of his constituents are Hindus. We are rightly proud of our domestic anti-discrimination legislation, which provides one of the strongest legal frameworks in the world, and I have very much taken his comments about timing on board.

### IVF

8. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): If she will discuss with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care steps to ensure the welfare of women receiving IVF treatment. [904685]

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinéage):** Women's welfare during IVF treatment is extremely important. The regulatory framework established by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 means that IVF can be provided only by clinics licensed by the UK regulator, which must ensure that all IVF services are safe and of high quality.

**Siobhain McDonagh:** This year we celebrate 40 years of IVF, and more than a quarter of a million children have been successfully conceived in the UK. However, a staggering 3% to 8% of women undergoing IVF suffer from moderate to severe occurrences of the completely avoidable ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome, with a shocking three deaths every 100,000 cycles. Does the Minister agree that the outdated Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act should be amended to make essential provision for the welfare of women?

**Caroline Dinage:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right to talk about this. IVF has made a massive difference to families up and down this country. I know that she has worked long and hard on this particular issue, for which I thank her. Health professionals always have a duty to act in the best interests of the patients whom they care for, and fertility treatment is no exception. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is leading work to better understand OHSS, and it will be supporting clinics to ensure that care is of the highest standard.

### Shared Parental Leave

10. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to increase the take-up of shared parental leave. [904688]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):** The Government want more families to take advantage of the opportunities offered by shared parental leave. That was why the Government launched a £1.5 million communication campaign in February to raise awareness of the shared parental leave and pay schemes. This is ongoing, and is supported by improved advertising and guidance for parents and their employers.

**Chris Elmore:** I welcome the Minister's answer, but may I ask what discussions the Government have had about implementing the recommendation in the Fawcett Society's sex discrimination law review that shared parental pay and paternity pay should be the right of all employees from their first day of employment?

**Andrew Griffiths:** It is an obvious point. Many people say that one of the barriers to their taking shared parental leave is the difference in pay in relation to fathers rather than mothers. The shared parental leave scheme was only introduced in 2015; we are currently evaluating it to see how it is working, and we will report in the spring of 2019. However, the hon. Gentleman's points are very relevant, and we are keeping abreast of the issue.

### Upskirting

12. **Wera Hobhouse** (Bath) (LD): If the Government will support legislative proposals to include upskirting as a crime under the Sexual Offences Act 2003. [904690]

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart):** I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work that she has done on this important issue. Upskirting is a disgusting and horrifying offence. There is a great deal more that we can do to educate the police and prosecuting authorities about their current ability to prosecute offenders under the outraging public decency offence, but we are also looking very actively at the private Member's Bill tabled by the hon. Lady.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I thank the Minister for agreeing to meet me in May to discuss the issue, but may I ask why he believes that the law is currently adequate? A 10-year-old girl was a victim of this crime not far from my constituency, but nothing could be done under the current law.

**Rory Stewart:** The formal answer to that question is that, as the hon. Lady knows, the decision was made independently by the Crown Prosecution Service, but there are a number of laws under which we can currently secure successful criminal convictions. There is the outraging public decency legislation of 2015, and, in the case of a child, indecent images legislation. However, we clearly need think more about digital images in the current age, and we are happy to sit down and continue to discuss the hon. Lady's Bill.

### Women's Refuges

13. **Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect on women's refuges of proposed reforms to supported housing. [904692]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):** The reforms will mean that the same amount of money that would have been available through housing benefit in 2020-21 will be made available as a grant to fund bed spaces directly. However, we are listening to the views of everyone involved in the domestic abuse sector, and we are carrying out a comprehensive audit of how domestic abuse services are delivered locally and how we can implement the best way to deliver those services.

**Liz Twist:** The Minister has said that she is aware of the huge concern in Women's Aid and other domestic violence charities about the ending of housing benefit for those in refuges, but there have already been cuts amounting to more than £6.5 million over the past eight years. Will she undertake to work with her colleagues in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to develop proposals to address those concerns and ensure that places in refuges are available to those who need them?

**Victoria Atkins:** Refuges are a vital part of helping women and children to deal with the awful crime of domestic abuse and build better lives for themselves. We know that the number of bed spaces has increased by 10% since 2010, but we do not for a moment approach this issue complacently. I have said repeatedly, as has my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, that no options are off the table. We hope very much that the hon. Lady and others will contribute to our domestic abuse consultation to ensure that the law that we hope to introduce by the end of the Session is the best possible law to help the victims.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): Will the Minister reassure the House that any changes that the Government make will not reduce the number of women's refuges? In particular, will she guarantee that they will not affect victims of human trafficking, whom the Government look after very well at the moment?

**Victoria Atkins:** My hon. Friend has led a long campaign on modern slavery and human trafficking. We are very happy to give the reassurance for which he asks. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and, indeed, the Prime Minister have made that commitment, because, as my hon. Friend knows, it is a personal priority for both of them.

### Topical Questions

T1. [904693] **Eddie Hughes** (Walsall North) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Women and Equalities (Amber Rudd):** If I may, I will briefly return to the issue of gender pay gap reporting. Tomorrow is the deadline for employers in the public sector to report their gender pay gaps, and all other employers with more than 250 staff must report by next Wednesday. I have this morning's figures from the update of gender pay gap reporting, and I can inform the House that we have 98% registration and 81% reporting from the public sector and 82% registration and 45% reporting from the private and voluntary sectors. I hope that employers will take this opportunity to accelerate their reporting, because it is unacceptable in 2018 that there are still differences in the amounts that men and women are paid in industries from finance to beauty, and we intend to take action.

**Eddie Hughes:** As the local elections approach, will the Minister tell the House what steps the Government are taking to tackle online abuse of women in public office?

**Amber Rudd:** This is such an important question. We all know how terrible the growth of online abuse has been, particularly towards women, and when we want to encourage more women to participate in public life, it is shameful that it takes place. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has ordered a Law Commission review to ensure that what is illegal offline is illegal online and the appropriate action is being taken to follow that up.

**Dawn Butler** (Brent Central) (Lab): Many women will have slept a little more soundly last night after the decision by the Parole Board not to release the rapist John Worboys. The Government argued that a challenge was highly unlikely to succeed, but the brave survivors and the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, proved the Government wrong. Will the Minister explain why, given the clear evidence that Worboys was a danger to women, the Government refused to take action?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue, which is so important. I know that everybody feels enormous sympathy and concern for the victims of this terrible atrocity. I welcome yesterday's result. We need victims to be supported and to feel that the law works for them. My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has said that he will look at making sure that in future there are changes to the Parole Board to ensure that there is much more transparency in such incidents.

T3. [904695] **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What is being done to ensure fair access to apprenticeships and work in all sectors for marginalised groups in society?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Andrew Griffiths):** I thank my hon. Friend for that question, and there are few in this House who have done more to champion apprenticeships and the benefits that they can bring, particularly to young people. We want all young people and everybody in work to benefit from the apprenticeship

scheme, which is why we are committed to having 3 million apprenticeships by 2020. So far, we have achieved 1.2 million. It is also why we are spending some £2.45 billion in cash terms, double the amount we spent in 2010.

T2. [904694] **Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Have the Government made any assessment of whether local councils are meeting their duties under the Equality Act 2010, by keeping pavements clear of obstructions and safe for disabled people to walk?

**Amber Rudd:** It is essential that disabled people can go about their daily lives. Particularly as we move towards the local elections, it is important that they can get out, so that we can ensure that everybody participates in voting. On the hon. Gentleman's specific question, I will find out from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government whether it has made any such assessment.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): On equality in politics for women, does the Minister for Women and Equalities agree with some senior Members in this House that the next leader of the Labour party, for instance, should be a woman and that perhaps that implies that the next leader of the Conservative party must be a man?

**Mr Speaker:** Those are not matters for the Minister for Women and Equalities. Who knows, she might have a personal interest in these matters—I do not know? Let us hear from her anyway, because it is very interesting.

**Amber Rudd:** I step forward gingerly following that introduction, Mr Speaker. My hon. Friend will know that on the Government Benches we believe that merit should be the decider for high office, while believing that women should be equally represented. We feel that our selection process and our promotion process allow both things to take place, and we are proud of the party that has had two women leaders and two women Prime Ministers.

T4. [904696] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As one of the MPs who was happy to support the Guide Dogs Talking Buses campaign, I was pleased that the Government agreed to introduce legislation. The key question is: when will the regulations come forward that make audiovisual information mandatory on buses?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. I will have to look into it and get back to him.

T5. [904698] **Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): This is National Autism Week, and I should like to ask the Minister whether she is aware that girls are often picked up as being on the autism spectrum much later than boys. Will she urge her colleagues to ensure that, like Sweden, we have a good, early and specific test for autism in every primary school?

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage):** I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the fact that this is National Autism Week. We are all wearing our badges with pride, and I hope that he will take part in the

Back-Bench debate on this subject later today. He is right to say that girls get diagnosed later and less frequently than boys, and this is something that we are looking at very carefully as we renew our work on the autism strategy.

T6. [904699] **Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Sir Robert Devereux, the former permanent secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions who oversaw the increase in the state pension age for women born in the 1950s, retired in January. My constituent, Paulette, a former NHS worker, wants to know why, having made national insurance contributions for 45 years, she will have to work until she is 66 to get a pension of £159 a week, while Sir Robert has retired with a taxpayer-funded pension of £85,000 a year at the age of 61.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse):** As the hon. Gentleman will know, this issue has been debated widely and extensively in this House. I would ask him to contemplate what inequalities would be produced for men, and indeed for women born in the 1960s, if changes were made to the pension arrangements, which have effectively been advertised since 1995, for women born in the 1950s.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): The appalling abuse of Alice Terry on social media overnight demonstrates the totally unacceptable direction of travel of political debate in this country. Does my right hon. Friend agree that no party should have any problem whatever with signing the respect pledge?

**Amber Rudd:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I was shown the sort of abuse that Alice Terry received overnight, and it was particularly horrific and persistent. A lot of my colleagues on the Government Benches have stated their support for her, and I would urge some—not all—Opposition Members to take more action to speak out against such abuse because, as Lord Bew's independent review of this issue has shown, a lot of it comes from the hard left, also known as Momentum.

T7. [904700] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The 113 MPs, including me, who wrote to the Home Secretary last year enjoyed some momentum and made progress when she agreed to undertake a review of the feasibility of exclusion zones around abortion clinics, but it is all gone a bit quiet since the evidence deadline passed. When can we expect the conclusions, and will there be good news for the vulnerable women who simply want to have their NHS treatment in anonymity and for the regular pavement users—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry. I do try to help the House by extending the envelope for topical questions, but it is not fair if Members then ask very long questions—*[Interruption.]* Forgive me; I do try to help Members, but Members must help one another.

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady will know, because we have spoken about this, how much I care about it. I thank her for bringing the matter forward. The consultation has concluded, and we are now looking at it. I will make sure that she is one of the first to know when we decide how to bring it forward.

**Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Gender pay gap reporting has made me angry, not just because companies need to do more but because we all need to do more. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should all check whether we have gendered expectations, particularly of children, and that those of us with influence should be very careful about how we treat young people?

**Amber Rudd:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. One of the benefits of gender pay gap reporting is that it reveals what has been hidden before. In a lot of issues to do with gender, this is about making certain elements much more transparent than they were before. The hon. Lady might be angry, but I take the view that we need to take action. Taking action will do more than being angry.

## Infected Blood Inquiry

10.43 am

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office to reconsider the decision to deny funding for legal assistance and advice to those affected by the contaminated blood scandal during the consultation on the terms of reference for the infected blood inquiry.

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith)**: The infected blood inquiry is a priority for this Government. The infected blood tragedy of the '70s and '80s should never have happened, and the victims, who have endured so much pain and hardship, deserve answers. The Government will ensure that the inquiry has the resources it needs to complete its work as quickly as a thorough examination of the facts allows. We are committed to making sure that all those who have suffered so terribly can have the answers they have spent decades waiting for and that lessons can be learned so that a tragedy of this scale can never happen again.

We want to make sure that all those who need to contribute to the inquiry can do so. The Inquiries Act 2005 allows for the chair to make awards for legal representation for the inquiry itself once it is formally established—in other words, after the terms of reference have been set. We know that the inquiry chair intends to make early provision for core participant designation and legal expenses awards after the inquiry is formally set up. So the Government are not denying funds for legal representation at the inquiry. These funds will be available as soon as possible after the inquiry is up and running.

In addition, I can confirm that Ministers have decided that reasonable expenses properly incurred in respect of legal representation for the purpose of responding to the consultation by the infected blood inquiry on the terms of reference prior to the setting-up date will be awarded. Any claims will be handled by the solicitor to the inquiry, and it will be for the solicitor to determine these expenses. I hope that that is good news to the House.

I know that the chair of the inquiry, Sir Brian Langstaff, is keen to ensure that all those affected by this tragedy have a chance to make their voices heard. I know that last night he held a meeting with interested groups and that he is continuing to engage with those who are affected and the bereaved families. Sir Brian wants to ensure that the consultation process is as user-friendly and inclusive as possible, and such that legal advice is not a necessity for being able to respond to the consultation on the terms of reference. He wants to ensure that everyone has the chance to share their views, which will inform the terms of reference.

We believe that this is an exceptional circumstance. Thousands of people have been fighting for years to get answers to why this terrible tragedy happened, and they want to be part of ensuring that such a tragedy can never happen again. I know that the whole House welcomes the fact that the Government have established this judge-led public inquiry to provide the answers that victims and families have had to wait for. I and others here today, I am sure, will continue to play our parts passionately for our constituents.

**Diana Johnson**: I thank the Minister for her response. I just wish that the decision had been made earlier. As she outlined, this is a group of people who have battled for many, many years for a public inquiry, and we now want to make sure that the terms of reference are so drafted as to incorporate all the concerns of those affected. As she will know, many of those implicated in the inquiry will have access now to legal advice and expertise in their submissions on what the terms of reference should be.

I must add that the letter of 23 March, drafted by the Minister's civil servants, which tried to draw a contrast with the families affected by Grenfell—who have been granted exceptional funding for legal assistance—saying that those families were more deserving than this group of people, has caused enormous hurt in the community. Of course we want to make sure that the Grenfell families find out what happened, and 71 lives were lost in that case, but in this case, 2,400 people have already died, and since the announcement of the public inquiry last year, another 70 have died. Many are living with HIV and hepatitis C, and many are co-infected, so they are in poor health. I am really pleased, therefore, that the Minister and the Government have accepted the argument that, while the organisations are well funded to put their cases, individuals should also have access to legal advice and guidance.

I want to say finally that I have met with Mr Justice Langstaff, and I believe that he will do his best to get justice for this group of people. He met with some of the campaigning groups last night, and I know that those meetings went well, but I hope that the Minister will pay particular attention, between now and when the inquiry is set up and Mr Justice Langstaff takes over, to making sure that no more decisions are made that put these individuals, who have been so damaged by the state, in a position where they feel hurt and lack confidence in what I think the Government are trying to do, which is to have a public inquiry that instils the confidence and good will of everybody.

**Chloe Smith**: As I have said from the Dispatch Box before, I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her work, her campaigning and her compassionate tenacity on this issue. I have worked with her over the years, as have many other Members, and I am pleased that she welcomes the news that I have been able to bring to the House this morning. I reiterate that Ministers share her concerns and are keen to be able to get on with the inquiry as quickly as possible. It will be ably led by Sir Brian Langstaff, so that the constituents whom we all serve can get the answers that they deserve.

In response to her questions, it may be useful for the House if I say that, under the Inquiries Act 2005, it is for Ministers to make decisions, on an exceptional basis, on whether funds might be made available during this preliminary stage. That is what we have done today, because we believe that the circumstances are exceptional.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): My constituent Lesley Hughes was infected with hepatitis C back in 1970, and that timescale suggests that thousands of documents must be held by the relevant Department. Will the Minister assure us that full disclosure of all such relevant documents will be made?

**Chloe Smith:** Technically, it is for the inquiry chair to give that assurance, but Ministers, officials and the machinery of Government will be fully co-operating with the inquiry and will give evidence if asked. All the relevant papers will be submitted, and the inquiry can also request evidence under oath.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for continuing to champion this important issue. I echo the concerns that she and other colleagues have raised.

The victims of this appalling tragedy have been waiting decades for answers and for justice. Sadly, they continue to wait for the justice they so desperately deserve. I note the Minister's personal commitment to the victims of the scandal, and I welcome the movement that she has made today towards correcting a perceived wrong that we heard about in the House yesterday. I am sure that the Minister appreciates that it was deeply concerning for many of the victims to be informed by the Cabinet Office that they had been denied legal aid funding for advice during the crucial consultation period on the terms of reference, but we welcome the movement today.

The letter from the Cabinet Office caused understandable upset among contaminated blood victims and their families, particularly the comments relating to Grenfell. While the contaminated blood scandal and the Grenfell fire are obviously different, there are two key similarities—both have had a devastating impact on the lives of those involved, and both should not have happened. The contaminated blood tragedy has killed over 2,400 people, and 70 people have died since the inquiry was announced last year. I hope that the Minister appreciates why the letter of 23 March has caused offence; will she apologise for it on behalf of the Government? The active participation of Grenfell victims led to the terms of reference in that inquiry being wider than those initially suggested by the chair. It is therefore welcome news that victims of the contaminated blood scandal will now be afforded the same opportunity to influence the terms of reference for this inquiry.

**Chloe Smith:** I thank the Opposition Front-Bench team for their support for what I have been able to announce today. I share the keenness of the hon. Lady and all colleagues to see the inquiry done and done well. I have reflected on the letter that was sent by my officials, and I am sorry for any concern that has been caused by it. By way of explanation, I return to the fact that Cabinet Office officials were expressing the normal position under the Inquiries Act, which is that, as I explained to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), Ministers may decide to provide funding for the preliminary stage of any inquiry on an exceptional basis. I have already explained that we certainly see this tragedy as exceptional and Ministers have therefore made the decision that I have conveyed to the House today. I hope that it is clear that the normal position under the Inquiries Act is that there would not be such funding, but we have decided that there ought to be.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): The people who know most about a tragedy are often the victims and their families, so will my hon. Friend do all she can to

listen to them, especially with regard to the terms of reference, and to deliver for those affected by the contaminated blood scandal?

**Chloe Smith:** I welcome that reminder that the people we are doing this for are those who have suffered so awfully over too many years, which is why I am pleased that Sir Brian Langstaff is moving forward on making sure that the terms of reference are as they should be and reflect what people who have suffered need to make known to the inquiry. That work is being done at the moment, and I look forward to the good-quality terms of reference that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster or I will present back to Parliament shortly.

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this urgent question and on her persistence in standing up for the victims of this scandal. I also warmly welcome what the Minister has said today.

Getting the answers that the victims of this scandal deserve requires asking the right questions and making sure that the inquiry has the right remit, and it is good that what the Minister has said means that that will now happen. I share the concern that the letter from the Cabinet Office was, as some have described it, contemptuous and insulting. How that came about should be looked at.

Is it not now time for the ongoing review of legal aid to be made entirely independent of Government? Will the Minister make sure that the provision of legal aid for those involved in public inquiries is part of that review, including the operation of pre-inquiry funding?

**Chloe Smith:** I believe that the hon. Gentleman raises an issue that is not what we are discussing today. I would be happy to come back to him with more detail on the broader review of legal aid, but I do not believe the issues we are discussing today are specifically those of legal aid, as we commonly use that phrase. I hope I have explained the position that applies to this inquiry, but I would be happy to come back to him on his other question relating to legal aid.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): I start with the words of my constituent:

“The miracle of child birth tainted and forever seen as a sadness by my advice to abort my child at 7 months old. An empty vessel of a lost life and its opportunities of normal happiness and future building.”

Gone forever, after which she was advised that she should be sterilised. How tragic. This happened 30 years ago, and she still lives in secrecy. I want her voice to be heard by the Minister in this place. My constituent has not told a soul to this day. Given that she has waited for 30 years, I am sure that she will welcome the legal aid. How much longer will she need to wait for the final answers?

**Chloe Smith:** That is one of the most awful things I have heard during my time in this place. It speaks for itself.

On the timeline, I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance for her constituent that the consultation on the inquiry's terms of reference will close in late April. Very shortly

[Chloe Smith]

afterwards, Sir Brian Langstaff will review what he has received and report to Ministers, who will then lay the way forward before Parliament. Thus the inquiry will start very shortly in the weeks after 26 April.

As I have previously relayed to the House, the judge intends to conduct the inquiry as quickly as possible, consistent with getting to the truth and getting to those answers. In that sense at least, I hope that my hon. Friend's constituent will be able to draw a little comfort from what we are doing.

**Jamie Stone** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): In light of the Minister's helpful initial answer, will she and the Government reconsider the decision that, from April 2018, compensation payments will not be increased in line with inflation?

**Chloe Smith:** I will write to the hon. Gentleman on that point in order to give him the fullest possible answer.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): Victims of other scandals, such as Epilim—valproate—and surgical mesh, report that they have not always been properly represented by the interested groups. Will my hon. Friend therefore ensure that those individuals who feel they are not being represented by particular interested groups have access to proper legal aid so they can put forward their case, rather than just being represented by a group of people?

**Chloe Smith:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and one that the chair of the inquiry has also pointed at: that he wants people's real voices to be heard. Some will feel comfortable for that to be done on their behalf through campaign groups—I pay tribute to the work of many of those groups, which have walked these long miles over the years—but others will prefer to do it in their own individual ways. I hope that the decision I have relayed to the House this morning can accommodate both.

As I mentioned, the consultation on the terms of reference is still live, and I encourage constituents of every right hon. and hon. Member to have a look at it and participate. The way that is produced is designed to be as user-friendly as possible, and therefore as open as possible to those who wish to respond in their own right. None the less, as I have said today, all reasonable expenses properly incurred in this respect will be looked at by the inquiry.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on the dogged way in which she has pursued this matter. I also thank the Minister for the statement she has made today. She will acknowledge that many victims of the contaminated blood scandal are feeling angry and frustrated at the lack of progress to date. Will she keep an open mind on any representations that may be made arising out of her statement today?

**Chloe Smith:** I certainly will. The Government are keen to hear any and all representations that are relevant here although the focus rightly begins to turn towards the inquiry that is to be set up, and it is for its chair to hear those representations fully.

I have said in my remarks today and previously that this matter has taken too long to reach the justice that we now hope can be done, but the Government are now acting swiftly. I would not accept the right hon. Gentleman's characterisation that at present the Government are in some way delaying, as we are not. We are getting on with the inquiry, and that is as it should be.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and thank the Minister for her statement. Will she confirm that the judge will engage properly with the victims and representative groups? Will she set out what lessons have been learned, so that nothing like this ever happens again?

**Chloe Smith:** I know that Sir Brian Langstaff wants to do exactly that. I will not be able to answer today as to what the lessons learned are, as that will of course be the work of the inquiry, but I know Parliament will be kept fully informed of this process so that we can continue to reassure our constituents.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): May I reiterate to the Minister that these families, including the Smith family from Newport whose tragic story was told in an excellent article in *The Guardian* recently, have been through so much? That is why it is so important that we are sensitive to getting this process absolutely right.

**Chloe Smith:** I welcome the fact that the hon. Lady and other hon. Members have been able to voice their constituents' words, both in this session this morning and on several other occasions in Parliament. Too many people have felt that they do not have that voice. Members of Parliament may be able to help in providing that, and I hope that this inquiry can also assist in providing it.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): I welcome what my hon. Friend has had to say today. As she might be aware, one of my constituents experienced real difficulties in accessing the treatment that she so desperately needed, and we have managed to resolve that. Is that ease of access to treatment something that could be considered by the inquiry?

**Chloe Smith:** The inquiry will specifically be about the cause and conduct in respect of the problem as it has unfolded over the years. As my hon. Friend and the House will be aware, other present-day policy questions arise as to what is available to the victims of this scandal. I know that my colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care will have listened to what he has said today and will be keen to continue to provide that assurance to the House also.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Minister will realise that those affected by the contaminated blood scandal have very low levels of trust in the Government and other authorities, not least because they have been literally short-changed over so many years. Today's announcement is good, but will the Minister say whether the Government will make funds available going forward, particularly to fulfil any recommendations made by the inquiry?

**Chloe Smith:** As I have already said, the inquiry will most certainly be fully resourced and fully facilitated by the Government. For rather obvious reasons, I will refrain from commenting on what the recommendations of the inquiry might be—I cannot do that today—but I have confidence that we will return to discuss in this place what needs to be done afterwards, and that we will give that our very fullest attention.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for her response to the urgent question. We should be grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for her dogged perseverance on this matter—for us in this House but even more so for the people outside the House. I thank her very much.

Will the legal aid and terms of reference be extended to the victims of the contaminated blood scandal in Northern Ireland who have been greatly disadvantaged and whose health has been affected? They equally qualify for the financial assistance that the Minister referred to.

**Chloe Smith:** The previous time I updated the House on this inquiry, Members spoke about the need for the inquiry to respond to the needs of victims in all the nations of our country. I am happy to write the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, to other representatives of constituencies in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, should they have such questions, to set out exactly what the situation will be for their constituents.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): My constituent, a victim of the contaminated blood scandal, has asked the Minister the following: now that a cover-up and illegal research have been acknowledged in Parliament, the Prime Minister has used the word “scandal” and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State has said that this should never have happened, why are dying victims waiting for compensation? Why will the Cabinet not show leadership? At what point do the Government increase the insult by failing to acknowledge their liability for what the Prime Minister has described as a scandal?

**Chloe Smith:** We are having an inquiry to answer those questions.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her announcement. It is important that the terms of reference are considered widely. My constituent has suffered not only from receiving contaminated blood at the time of the birth of her daughter in 1986, but further injustice because the medical records have been lost. Does the Minister agree that it is important that she makes the case for the fullest possible terms of reference? Her announcement today will help with that.

**Chloe Smith:** The hon. Lady gives us yet another example of how people have suffered in this terrible saga, over time. I hope that her constituent’s experience will be reflected in the terms of reference. I urge the hon. Lady and all Members to encourage their constituents to complete the form, which is extremely easily accessible

on the inquiry website, to ensure that their voices are properly heard. The inquiry can then proceed to do its full job.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): My constituent, Sue Sparkes, wrote to me and described as “crass” and “insensitive” the letter that made the comparison with Grenfell. Will the Minister do two things today? First, she has rightly rowed back from that position, but will she undertake to consult my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) before the Cabinet Office issues letters of that kind in future? Secondly, will she apologise for the hurt caused by that letter?

**Chloe Smith:** I think the hon. Gentleman would have heard me do so earlier, but I am happy to say again that I am sorry for the concern caused by that letter. In case he missed it, I shall repeat the explanation that I gave a little while ago. My officials in the Cabinet Office were carrying out what is actually the normal legal position for inquiries, which is that Minister would decide by exception whether to provide funding for legal assistance in this preliminary period. I refer to section 40 of the Inquiries Act 2005. I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s reminder that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North has done so much work here. I am happy to meet her at any time to discuss the issues at hand in a way that is appropriate around the work of the inquiry.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): The Minister has made a gracious and positive response to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), but will she indicate to the House whether there is a cap on individual financial support in the consultation period and, crucially, in the actual inquiry period?

**Chloe Smith:** What I have said to the House today is that it will be for the solicitor to the inquiry to determine those expenses, so I am not in a position directly to answer the right hon. Gentleman’s question today. As I have said, my colleagues and I have decided that reasonable expenses, which are properly incurred in respect of legal representation for the purpose of responding to the consultation of the inquiry on the terms of reference, will be awarded.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing this issue to the House and, indeed, to the Minister for accepting the issue and for her tone this morning. Since being first elected in 2015, I have been in regular contact with victims of this scandal, who have been deeply frustrated by the pace at which the Government have been dealing with this. Will she commit her Government now to do what is in their power to move this process on as quickly as possible, with dignity and compassion, for those who have been affected by this outrageous scandal?

**Chloe Smith:** As I have said this morning already and have said before, we want this inquiry to move as quickly as possible so that people get the answers that they deserve, and have deserved for many years.

## Business of the House

11.11 am

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

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for the week commencing 16 April is as follows:

MONDAY 16 APRIL—Second Reading of the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill [*Lords*], followed by general debate on housing and homes.

TUESDAY 17 APRIL—General debate on anti-Semitism followed by debate on a motion on redress for victims of banking misconduct and the FCA. The subject of this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

WEDNESDAY 18 APRIL—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Laser Misuse (Vehicles) Bill [*Lords*], followed by general debate on industrial strategy.

THURSDAY 19 APRIL—Debate on a motion on surgical mesh, followed by debate on a motion on cancer treatment. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 20 APRIL—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 23 April will include:

MONDAY 23 APRIL— Second Reading of the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwelling) Bill.

Young people are vital to our democracy. Their participation and their voices are crucial to a fair and equal society, so I was very sad to hear of the sudden death of Clarissa Slade, the UK's youngest councillor, representing Tiverton. I am sure that the whole House will join me in sending our thoughts and prayers to her family and friends.

During recess, we will mark 20 years of the historic Belfast agreement. That agreement, along with its successors, has been fundamental in helping Northern Ireland move forward from its violent past to a brighter, more secure future. Our support for the 1998 agreement remains resolute.

This weekend is a hugely important celebration for millions of people. Christians celebrate the extraordinary sacrifice of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, giving us hope for everlasting life. For those of the Jewish faith, tomorrow is the beginning of Passover, a time of celebrating their liberation by God from slavery. May I wish everyone of all faiths and of none a very happy and peaceful Easter?

Finally, today marks a year until we leave the EU. I am confident that the decision taken by the people of the United Kingdom offers us a superb new chapter in the history of our great nations. As the Prime Minister has said, "Let's get on with it".

**Valerie Vaz:** I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business. Yet again, it is only for a week and a day. I also thank her for the list of ministerial responsibilities—it is in a Vote Office near you.

The Leader of the House announced the business after the Easter recess: it is just general debates. Can we have a debate on racism, particularly in light of the leaflet by Havering Conservatives, claiming that the Leader of the Opposition and the Mayor of London want to turn Havering into Hackney, Newham and other London boroughs—not like Essex? Will she condemn that leaflet, just as her colleague, the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Nick Boles), has done?

I am going to keep asking until we get it: when will the Trade Bill, the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill and the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Bill return on Report? And I am going to ask again about the statutory instrument on postgraduate nursing bursaries—the Education (Student Support) (Amendment) Regulations 2018—that has been prayed against, but has not been listed for hearing. Indeed, the shadow Secretary of State for Education raised a point of order on this matter on Monday. Mr Speaker, you made it very clear that this House runs on conventions and precedents. That is why we want a debate when we pray against a statutory instrument. The Government appear to be throwing out the conventions of this House.

I ask the Leader of the House about the debate on early-day motion 1111 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon), praying against the Criminal Legal Aid (Remuneration) (Amendment) Regulations 2018. There is clearly plenty of time for this, because the Leader of the House has only scheduled general debates. Lawyers are at breaking point. They are concerned about cuts to legal aid, the burdens of disclosure and racial inequality in the criminal justice system.

The Government have offered full support to the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed). The Bill received unanimous support on both sides of the House, including from the Health Minister. The Bill was due to go to Committee four weeks ago, but the Government failed to lay a money resolution, so the Committee was cancelled at short notice. It was then scheduled for the week after, but the Government again failed to lay a money resolution so the Committee was cancelled. The following week there was no money resolution, so the Committee was cancelled again. This week—yet again—the Government have failed to lay a money resolution. That is four weeks in a row.

Apparently, the Government Whips have said that there is no time for business, but the House adjourned early this week and last week. When will the Government lay that money resolution? The Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability for Housing Standards) Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck), with which we all agree, still has no date to enter Committee. It seems that the Government do not want to fix any business and want to gag the Opposition by flouting conventions and fixing general debates. There is a danger that we will become like Northamptonshire County Council—a large, fancy building with a bankrupt Government inside.

Will the Leader of the House ask the Foreign Secretary to stop calling people names, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), the shadow Foreign Secretary? He was hoping that that would be the headline. In political terms, it was a dead cat on the table, because the only

name that he should have been using was that of Christopher Wylie, who gave evidence for four hours on Cambridge Analytica and possible breaches of electoral law during the EU referendum. Will the Leader of the House reassure the House that the Information Commissioner will get further resources to do these investigations, if she requires them?

As the Leader of the House has said, it is half-time for the article 50 process. The regions are still anxious about what Brexit will mean for them. In Northern Ireland, the people voted to remain. There has been no decision on a hard border, but the Department for Exiting the European Union has suffered the loss of Simon Case, who was director general for Northern Ireland and Ireland. Scotland voted to remain, and the Government's own analysis shows that a hard Brexit could cost Scotland's economy £12.7 billion by 2030. Wales, which voted to leave, is looking at other methods of economic development and new energy, one of which is the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. Ken Skates, Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Transport in Wales, has said that Wales is

“prepared to consider a loan and/or equity investment”.

It now needs the UK Government to declare whether they will support the development. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees), who is sitting here, would be very happy to accompany the Prime Minister to have a look at the site of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon while she is walking in Wales.

When will we have a statement on the Galileo satellite project? UK companies have been at the forefront of the technology. The Prime Minister is apparently scrambling to stop Britain being excluded from the project. Can we have a statement on what the Government are doing to ensure that the UK remains part of the Galileo satellite project and is not locked out of the Copernicus project?

I, along with 107 other MPs, met Alfie Dingley's parents in Parliament last week. That was organised by the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning). Alfie had 150 seizures a month. Since he has been put on the medication, tetrahydrocannabinol, in the Netherlands, he has only had one. When will the Government agree to his medication exceptionally?

I want to pay tribute, along with the Leader of the House, to the very, very young councillor, and her commitment to public service too. It is absolutely heartbreaking for her parents.

I also want to pay tribute to the former Leader of the House in the other place, Ivor Richard. He had a distinguished career in both Houses as MP for Barons Court from 1964 to 1974, British ambassador to the United Nations from 1974 to 1979, and a European Commissioner from 1981 to 1985, before being made a peer in 1990. He was a brilliant parliamentarian in both Houses.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, and those in your office for their unfailing courtesy in helping me to do my work, and everyone else who supports me—all the Clerks and House staff, including the Doorkeepers, the House of Commons Library, the Official Reporters, catering and cleaning staff, postal workers, and especially security and digital services. I wish all right hon. and hon. Members a happy Easter. I hope that we can take on the Easter message of renewal and hope.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady has raised a wide range of subjects. As is often the case, I have to remind her that discussions on debates and offering time for debates take place through the usual channels.

On the hon. Lady's specific point about the nursing bursary statutory instrument, I do not think she is up to date on where we are with that. It is a matter of parliamentary convention that where a reasonable request for a debate has been made, time should be allowed for a debate. It was not possible for the Government to accommodate time within the praying period of the instrument that was laid before the House on 6 February, so we revoked the regulations on Tuesday and laid new regulations identical in substance to the original on Wednesday. Those regulations came into force today. This was as part of the arrangements made to give effect to the request from the official Opposition for a debate in Government time. We have fully worked with the Opposition to ensure that that request can be paid careful attention to and that we will be able to give time to that debate. I hope that that satisfies her.

The hon. Lady asks about other SIs that have been prayed against. Where a reasonable request for a debate has been made, it is the convention that time is allowed for it. That continues to be the case, and the Government continue to abide by all Standing Orders and conventions in this place.

The hon. Lady makes the assertion that there is no business going on. She will be aware that there have been some incredibly important debates. [*Interruption.*] She says from a sedentary position, “General debates”, as if somehow the only debates that are worth having are those on voteable motions. I have to disagree with her, because only this week we had a very important and very well-attended debate on national security and Russia. [*Interruption.*] Hon. Members are yelling from a sedentary position. At business questions each week, I get lots of requests for debates on subjects that are of significant interest to our constituents, to the national security of this country, and to diverse groups across the United Kingdom. Hon. Members cannot have it both ways. They cannot insist on having only voteable legislation brought before the House but then criticise me when we do not give them debates on general subjects that are of vital importance to the United Kingdom. I do urge hon. Members to keep that balance in mind.

The hon. Lady asks about private Members' Bills. There are a number of very valuable Bills that are supported right across the House and in the United Kingdom, and we will be bringing forward money resolutions in due course.

The hon. Lady asks about Cambridge Analytica and the Information Commissioner. As the Prime Minister said, the Information Commissioner's powers will be strengthened, and if more resources are necessary, they will be forthcoming.

The hon. Lady asks about the European Commission's threat that potentially the UK will be blocked out of projects such as Galileo and Copernicus. The UK makes a very strong and, in many areas, unique contribution to these projects. It is a matter for negotiation, but it is fully our intention to continue to collaborate and work closely with our EU friends and neighbours as we leave the European Union.

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

Finally, I join the hon. Lady in thanking all those who provide such good service in protecting and supporting us in our work in this place.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, indeed. Of course, I think we all feel very strongly that the staff of this House should be supported in every way. Indeed, some of us feel extremely strongly that they should be well paid and, where possible, better paid each year—and Parliament will be the judge of that, rather than any other institution.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): May we have a debate on areas of outstanding natural beauty and how we can increase the protection of those areas? During that debate, we could discuss the Chilterns AONB and the possibility of the Government designating it as a national park, to maintain its integrity, which is threatened by development on all sides. If we do not increase its protection to the highest level, which would be afforded by designating it as a national park, we could lose that precious environment as an asset for future generations to enjoy and benefit from.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend raises an issue that is of enormous importance across our United Kingdom. She will be aware that in our 25-year environment plan, it is the Government's intention that we will be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than we found it. The Government will be commissioning a review of designated landscapes in England which will examine their coverage, so there is more information to come, which I am sure she will welcome.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for after Easter.

As we have heard, it is now one year until we leave the European Union—Members are supposed to cheer at that point. I note that the Leader of the House said in a tweet this morning that she punches the air with joy at that prospect every morning. In Scotland, we are not quite doing that, as we have heard that it is going to cost us £12.7 billion. My country did not want Brexit. We did not vote for Brexit, yet Scotland will be taken out of the EU against our national collective will. I remember that in another referendum, we were told the only way to preserve Scotland's EU status was to vote no. Well, that worked out well for us, didn't it?

As for the business, or the non-business, when we get back, it is general debate central. This is business that has ceased to be, is bereft of life and has shuffled off its mortal coil and gone to meet its maker. This is as much ex-business as that unforgettable Norwegian blue parrot. It is a business statement from a zombie Government that pine for the fjords.

In Scotland and across Europe, people are being arrested just for having a political idea and vision for their country—people like Clara Ponsatí, a professor at St Andrews University who was arrested with a Spanish European arrest warrant. Her crime was believing that her country would be a better place if it governed itself, and peacefully and democratically making that her political aim. The UK is a country that hates state oppression, loves democracy and speaks out against

injustice throughout the world, so can we have a statement on that, even if it is just to ask Spain to think about what it is doing and the reputational damage it is causing itself?

Lastly, Mr Speaker, I wish you, your staff and staff right across the House a very happy Easter. It might come as a shock to some Conservative Members, but I understand that the Prime Minister is going for a walking holiday in Wales. Forget about hard borders for Ireland. The gentlemen on the Conservative Benches should be hastily constructing one in Wales, so that we do not suffer the same fate as we did last year.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman quoting from the fabulous Monty Python. It is lovely to hear it. There is a good opportunity over Easter to catch up on some Monty Python films.

The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point about Catalan independence and the extradition warrant applied for against a Member of the Catalan Parliament. Spain is a key ally of the United Kingdom, and of course we support its right to uphold its constitution. Nevertheless, I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, and we always urge every one of our allies to look carefully at the backdrop to these cases.

The hon. Gentleman also talks about the Prime Minister going to Wales. I think we would all encourage her to take a break, put work behind her and think only of the beautiful countryside and fabulous Welsh food. Can I be any clearer than that?

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): As the House of Commons is not sitting on 1 April, will the Leader of the House pay tribute today to the Royal Air Force, which celebrates its centenary on Sunday, and will she join me in paying homage to all those who have given their lives to protect our freedom?

**Andrea Leadsom:** Yes, I am of course delighted to join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to the RAF—as he says, on 1 April it will have been protecting our nation for 100 years—and to the so many who have given their lives to the service or made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I am very grateful to the Leader of the House for the business announcement, including the fact that we now have an important Back-Bench debate on Tuesday 17 April on redress for victims of banking misconduct and the Financial Conduct Authority. In hearing the bid for that debate, it was all too clear why this Chamber needs to debate such an important issue. Am I to understand that it will be preceded by a business of the House motion protecting the time for that debate with a minimum of three hours? If so, that would be greatly appreciated.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I will certainly look at whether we can do that.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the excessive pay of certain so-called senior people in the public sector? With regard to certain BBC executives and presenters, certain senior management in the NHS and the like, I just do not understand how any of them can possibly be worth more money than our Prime Minister.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly agree with my hon. Friend on the latter point. We must all ensure that public services show restraint and value for money. The BBC is of course independent of the Government, so the amount it pays its staff is a matter for the BBC. However, as a public service broadcaster funded by the licence fee, it has a responsibility to set an example to others, and of course to lead the way in promoting equality in the workplace. Transparency is vital right across the public sector, and the public certainly deserve to know how taxpayers' money is being spent.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): May we have a debate on the growing concern that the US Administration could be on the point of withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, which through patient negotiation has succeeded in controlling Iran's nuclear ambitions? In that context, may I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to early-day motion 1143, in my name and that of the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon)?

*[That this House notes with concern the possibility that the US Administration could move towards abandoning the Iran Nuclear Deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JPCOA); believes that this would undermine what has been achieved in controlling Iran's nuclear programme and damage both our credibility as international partners in negotiation and the pursuit of diplomacy as a means of promoting peace and ensuring security; asserts that weakening the deal would make it more difficult to keep Iran nuclear-free after the expiry of the special provisions of the JCPOA; and therefore expresses its support for the joint initiative from French and German Members of Parliament to urge members of the US Congress to stand by the Iran Nuclear Deal.]*

The early-day motion expresses our support for the joint initiative of French and German parliamentarians to urge Members of the US Congress to support the Iran nuclear deal, a call to which I hope Members of this House will add their names.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important issue. I know there is concern about the intentions of the US Administration regarding the Iran deal. I encourage him to seek an urgent debate in Westminster Hall or a Back-Bench business debate specifically to address this issue with a Foreign Office Minister.

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): Cricket is under enormous threat at the moment, because of what has happened with Australia, which is unacceptable. It is our national game, and I also want to mention the British situation. Somerset county cricket club, of which we are all very proud—I am one of the MPs representing the county—has just taken on a chairman who has been done for price fixing in his company and heavily fined. May we have a debate about our national game—in my eyes, it is our national game—which is important to all of us and is enjoyed by many thousands of people across the United Kingdom?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for the sport, and his concern about the way in which its reputation is being damaged by recent allegations. I encourage him to seek at the very least an Adjournment debate to address in particular the recent press stories of misconduct.

**Several hon. Members** rose—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. More than 30 right hon. and hon. Members are still seeking to catch my eye, but I remind the House that there is a statement to follow and then two debates under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee, of which the first is enormously heavily subscribed. There is a premium on brevity—to wit, single-sentence questions and replies that are comparably brief.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Has the Leader of the House seen early-day motions 1024 and 1036, calling for a commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the end of the first world war, and for giving shop workers and shoppers time to enjoy it by pushing back the Sunday opening hours on that day? EDM 1024 says:

*[That this House believes that all people in the UK should be able to pay their respects on 11 November 2018 to those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country during conflict; notes that this year marks the centenary of the end of the First World War; further notes that many people working in retail will not be able to commemorate this important anniversary due to the Sunday Trading Act (1980); and calls on the Government to encourage all shops covered by Sunday trading regulations to open from 12pm to 6pm on 11 November 2018 so that those working in retail are not required in work until memorial events have concluded.]*

Will she look at those early-day motions and find time for such a debate?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I would be delighted to consider that, and if the right hon. Gentleman would like to write to me, I will respond to him more fully.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): May we have an assurance that the forthcoming announcement on whether there will be a competition for the new generation of mechanised infantry vehicles will be made to the House when Parliament is sitting, and not in the recess?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend raises an important point. I cannot answer that question at the moment, but Defence questions are on 23 April, and if he wishes to write to me I will ask the Ministry of Defence on his behalf.

**Mr Speaker:** For the avoidance of doubt, the answer is very clear: the announcement should be in the House of Commons. That is the situation, and it is the responsibility of office holders to ensure that that is the case. I know the Leader of the House will take seriously her responsibility on that matter.

**Anna McMorrin** (Cardiff North) (Lab): We seem to have been waiting for the S4C statement, published today, longer than "Pobol y Cwm" has been on air, and there are still questions to be answered. May we have a Government statement that sets out a clear commitment to protect S4C's budget, to allow it to maintain its independence and integrity, rather than simply top-slicing, and to allocate a separate, immediate budget to enable it to make the transition to digital and compete on a level playing field?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The independent review will ensure that S4C continues to produce first-class content and serves Welsh-speaking audiences across the UK. The additional funding announced today will give S4C the certainty that it needs for the next two years to deliver its much-needed reforms.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Following the welcome announcement yesterday that NHS money will become available in north Essex, may we have an urgent statement from the Health Secretary to outline when capital funding will be made available for west Essex and Harlow? The Health Secretary has visited Harlow's hospital a number of times, and he is aware that the Princess Alexandra Hospital is not fit for purpose, and that our town desperately needs a hospital fit for the 21st century. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Health Secretary to do everything he can to ensure that Harlow has the new hospital it needs?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for drawing the attention of the House to yesterday's welcome announcement. The Princess Alexandra scheme submission was one of the largest in capital value, and further work will be needed on those large schemes to ensure that we use centrally available capital to demonstrate value for money and affordability to the health economy. NHS England will soon contact my right hon. Friend's sustainability and transformation partnership to communicate the next steps.

**John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab):** On 23 November 2016, 30 March 2017, and 9 February 2018 I wrote to the Government to ask for a debate in Government time on anti-Semitism. Over those 18 months, on all three occasions I was told that there would be such a debate. Now that it has been scheduled, and considering the importance of the issue, half a day is simply insubstantial and insignificant. We need a full day's debate, and I am sure that Labour Members would be happy to agree to a rearrangement of business to give it a full day. Will the Leader of the House please take that suggestion away and consider it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I share the hon. Gentleman's grave concern about anti-Semitism, and in recent weeks we have seen some appalling examples of anti-Semitic behaviour, which is utterly unacceptable. I will take away his request, but he will appreciate that there are lots of competing demands on time in this Chamber.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** In view of research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies that highlights how home ownership has declined over the past 20 years, may we have a debate on what the Government are doing to help people on to the housing ladder?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend's point is incredibly important to this Government, and we are fully committed to tackling that issue. There were 365,000 new first-time buyers in the UK last year, which is the highest number since 2006. There is a lot more to do, and we are committed both to tackling supply problems and to helping people on the demand side.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** I thank you, Mr Speaker, the Leader of the House, and everyone else who attended last week's memorial service

for Keith Palmer and all the other victims of the terrorist attack. It was a splendid, thoughtful and moving occasion. Thank you. May we have an early debate on knife crime, which is killing and injuring so many young men in our towns and cities? It is a national scourge, and we need a debate on that.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the excellent service last week, which was a very fitting tribute to those who lost their lives. He is right that knife crime is a challenge and a real problem. The Home Office is looking at ways to tackle it and will be bringing forward its serious violence strategy soon. Operation Sceptre combines police forces to tackle the carrying and use of knives. I would certainly welcome a Backbench Business debate on knife crime, unless I can find Government time for a debate.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** May I thank you, Mr Speaker, for championing Back Benchers over a long period of time? In your rest over Easter, will you have the opportunity to read today's excellent *Daily Express*, which has a wonderful front-page headline? Inside, the Foreign Secretary is quoted as saying:

"Like an unstoppable express, we are heading for Brexit and frankly my friends, we can't arrive soon enough."

Could the Leader of the House somehow manage, in the next few weeks and months, to arrange one or two debates on the European Union?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend will be aware that we have already had one or two debates on the European Union, including two days of debate in response to demands from right across the House. As he will appreciate, I am under some pressure not to allow general debates, as Labour Members seem not to appreciate them, but as ever I will try to balance the requirements of all Members.

**Mr Speaker:** I know that the Leader of the House will seek to do that. I also know that in seeking to do that extremely conscientiously, she will bear in mind that if you did a straw poll of members of the public and asked them, "What do people in Parliament do?" the answer would be debate and vote—quite elementary, really.

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** May I press the Leader of the House to make time available for a further debate on the draft EU withdrawal agreement so that we can discuss the outstanding matters therein, such as the role of the European Court of Justice, the settlement of disputes, European arrest warrants, and Ireland and Northern Ireland? In that debate, would she expect the Department for Exiting the European Union to make it clear that the most difficult issues are still unresolved, and that the UK will not cut and run and get into transition with those matters still unresolved?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The right hon. Gentleman might be pleased to know that there is a debate on Brexit and justice today at 1.30 pm in Westminster Hall. As I mentioned, we have just had two days of general debate on the EU. There will be many more opportunities to discuss the Government's determination to get a good deal that works for the United Kingdom and for the European Union.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): May we have a debate on the rise of protectionism around the world, especially in relation to Government contracts, such as when a British company is not able to apply for a contract with another country but a French company, say, is able to take a contract awarded by the British Government?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point. The evidence is that free trade improves prosperity and opportunity for everybody. We intend, as we leave the EU, to be a global proponent of free trade, which will be in all our interests.

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): This week, a serial thief with 156 offences to his name appeared in a court near me. May we have a debate on how persistent offenders are dealt with in the judicial system, including a discussion on the use of exclusion orders?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises a very important issue—she often raises important justice issues—which clearly has great resonance in her constituency. She will be aware that the Government have invested £100 million in recruiting 2,500 new prison officers, and that we are creating 10,000 new high-quality modern prison places to ensure that we can focus our efforts on changing behaviour to try to minimise reoffending. At the same time, our work on reforming probation means that we are now monitoring 40,000 offenders who would previously have been released with no supervision. There is much more to be done, but we are improving the way in which we monitor those who have offended.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): From next Tuesday, when my Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 comes into force, every English local authority will have a statutory duty to assist local residents who are threatened with homelessness or who are homeless themselves. The Act will assist anyone threatened with homelessness, but may we have a statement after Easter on what the Government will do to help to combat the problem of rough sleeping right now?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate my hon. Friend again on his Homelessness Reduction Act, which is going to transform lives. He talks about the importance of solving the problem of rough sleeping and he is absolutely right. The Government are measuring it better. We have a “No Second Night Out” policy to actively identify and support rough sleepers, and we are taking unprecedented action to help people before they become homeless. Those are all very important measures.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): My constituent Patrina Fraser was told yesterday that her application to register as a British citizen had been refused for a second time. Patrina is just one of thousands of people who arrived in the UK from Commonwealth countries as children. They grew up believing that they were British, and have worked hard and contributed all their lives, but they are now being told that their status as citizens is in doubt. It is an outrageous situation. Can we have a debate in Government time about how this injustice might be addressed?

**Andrea Leadsom:** There are very clear rules around citizenship status. The hon. Gentleman raises an important constituency matter that I am sure Home Office Ministers

will look at. If he wants to write to me, I can take it up on his behalf. I also say to him that Home Office oral questions are on the first day back—16 April—and he might want to raise his specific point then.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): On Tuesday I was delighted to host, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones) and the Sikh Channel, a “Respect the Turban” event here in Parliament. It was fantastic to see many right hon. and hon. Members hearing of its significance. Sadly, the event was required due to a recent mindless attack on a Sikh gentleman outside Parliament. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking the Sikh community for their valuable contribution to the UK over many decades, and may we have a statement on what more the Government can do to prevent hate crimes in our society?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I join my hon. Friend in thanking the Sikh community for the fantastic contribution that they make to the United Kingdom. I absolutely commend him for hosting the recent event, and I was so sorry to hear about the unacceptable attack on a guest of the hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi) just outside this Palace. All hate crime is condemned by all hon. and right hon. Members across the House. I can tell my hon. Friend that since 2010 we have published a hate crime action plan. We are working with the police and communities to tackle all forms of hate crime, including by improving police recording of such crime so that forces now capture data on all five monitored strands and can deal with it accordingly.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley) (Lab): As the Minister knows, S4C is the only Welsh-language broadcaster in Wales. People will have been alarmed today to see the headline, “S4C set to lose UK government funding by 2022”. I am sure that people will lobby the Prime Minister when she is in Wales today, because there will be a lot of concern. I know that there is a lot more to it than this, but we should have a debate.

**Andrea Leadsom:** Since 2010, the Government have provided S4C with nearly £700 million of public funding. We remain committed to this very important Welsh-language channel, and the independent review will ensure that S4C continues to produce first-class content and to serve Welsh-speaking audiences right across the UK.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): Imagine my pride when Mr Emdadul Hussain, the chef at Redolence Spice in Redditch, took the Tiffin cup—the most fiercely fought competition held in this place. Out of 12,000 Indian restaurants, his was declared the winner, and if you knew how many Indian restaurants there are in the west midlands, Mr Speaker, you would understand how significant it is that this cup has gone to a west midlands company. Given the importance of the Indian food industry, which is worth £1.8 billion, may we have a debate in this House about how such restaurants can be properly supported as a key part of our local high streets?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I pay tribute to all the fabulous Indian restaurants that provide so many Saturday night dinners for all of us. The only observation I would make in congratulating my hon. Friend’s local restaurant on

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its superb achievement in winning the Tiffin cup is that I am sure you and I, Mr Speaker, should probably be judges of next year's competition. Would you not agree?

**Mr Speaker:** Oh, I do—I rather like the idea. I am rather partial to a curry myself.

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): May we have a statement from the Government on support for mortgage interest, which is due to change next month? My Sandyhills constituent, Eileen Flynn, has cancer and is receiving chemo at the moment. Serco is tasked with dispensing the loan, but it is not doing very well at that. Can we have a debate on this, and will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State to look into Eileen's case?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a serious constituency case, and I am very sorry to hear about it. If he wants to write to me, I can take it up with the Department for Work and Pensions on his behalf. As for the general point about changing what are effectively donations or benefits into mortgage interest loans, he will appreciate that the important point from a policy perspective is the balance between value for taxpayers and support for those who are in need of help with their mortgage interest payments.

**Mr John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The prospect of losing a child is a nightmare for parents, and the horror of its reality is exacerbated when they cannot afford to pay for a funeral. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a ministerial statement in response to the campaign by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris)? The financial support has been frozen for 15 years, and the heartbroken cannot be made to suffer any longer.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris), who has campaigned on this subject for a very long time. I think that there is support for the proposal throughout the House, and I will certainly look into it.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Children of my constituents who were sent to the two free schools set up by Raja Miah had a terrible educational experience. The schools were unsafe, there were no computers, children with special educational needs were given no support, and the teaching was of a poor standard. Both schools will be closed by the summer. The main beneficiary of this episode, which involved public expenditure of £13 million, seems to have been Mr Miah. Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Secretary of State for Education to explain, in either a statement or a debate, why he will not release the audit on the two schools, what he is doing to recover the money, and whether he has engaged the police in this matter?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a serious issue and I am very concerned to hear about it. It is obviously of great significance to children in his

constituency, and I urge him to seek an Adjournment debate. I am sure that you, Mr Speaker, would look favourably on that.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): Many high streets throughout the country are suffering, partly because shopping habits continue to change. May we have a debate so that we can discuss how the Government can help local authorities to reconfigure and regenerate our town centres?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We all agree about the importance of thriving shopping centres in our high streets, and it is commendable of the hon. Lady to raise the issue in the Chamber. The Government have sought to encourage councils to do more to develop their high streets by changing the way in which business rates accrue to them. However, I urge the hon. Lady to seek a Backbench Business debate so that all Members can share views and ideas about how we can improve the prospects for our high streets.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): May we have a debate on today's National Audit Office report on the cancellation of three rail electrification projects? The electrification of the midland main line was one of the projects that were cancelled but, astonishingly, the report says that the bimodal trains that were supposed to take the place of electrification do not exist. That is outrageous. People in Nottingham and throughout the east midlands are furious about this decision, and we need some explanation from the Secretary of State for Transport.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Transport Secretary announced in July 2017 in a written ministerial statement that new technologies would make it possible to improve passenger services before that could be achieved through rail electrification. In other words, the introduction of those bi-mode trains would enable far greater improvements, with far less disruption to passengers, long before the end of the disruption that would be caused by electrification.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Last Thursday I asked the Leader of the House which Department led on British sign language. She wrote to me this week—very efficiently and very kindly—to tell me that the Cabinet Office would respond to me directly, for which I am grateful. However, my parliamentary question to the Cabinet Office in September, and subsequent correspondence on 23 October, 19 December and 6 February, have so far failed to secure the information. Did the Cabinet Office say when I might expect a response?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can only apologise to the hon. Gentleman for the fact that the issue has not yet been resolved. I am happy to write to the Cabinet Office again.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): My constituent, Mr James McDonald, has specifically asked me to request a statement or debate on the spousal visa application process. Does the Leader of the House agree that the cost of these visas and the distress caused by the application process require a Government review and a debate in this House?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am not aware of exactly what the hon. Gentleman refers to when he mentions the distress caused by the application process. Obviously the Home Office seeks to recover the cost of providing those visas—not to make a profit, but to ensure that costs are covered. He will be aware that there are Home Office questions on the first day back—16 April—and I encourage him to raise any specific issues then.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In October last year, the Government announced life sentences for those causing death by dangerous driving. May we have an urgent statement on when the Government intend to introduce tougher sentences through legislation so that no more families have to suffer like the family of Joseph Brown-Lartey in my constituency, and those of Harry Rice, George Wilkinson and Josh McGuinness in Hayes?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady is right to raise that issue in the House and I hope that she was pleased, as many were, to hear that there would be new sentencing arrangements. There are Transport questions on 19 April, in the first week back after the recess, and I encourage her to seek an answer then.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): As the Government have plenty of time and no legislation, may we have a full day's debate in the Chamber on the response to the Grenfell Tower fire? This week we learned that 95 families from blocks around Grenfell are all still in emergency and temporary accommodation and that dangerous cladding has been removed from only seven of 160 social housing blocks around the country. That is an appalling record for which the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government is responsible. He needs to come here and give an account of himself.

**Andrea Leadsom:** It is absolutely clear—this has been made clear in every single statement—that the Government are determined to do everything possible to support the survivors of that appalling tragedy and to ensure that they can carry on with their lives. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave his last statement on 22 March, which was a regular update on progress in dealing with the Grenfell disaster. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the rehousing process must be very sensitive to the needs and requirements of the families concerned; it cannot just be about ensuring that they are placed regardless of their needs. The Government are determined to provide every support that we possibly can.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): With the number of deaths worldwide due to drug-resistant infection now exceeding 750,000, and predictions that that number will rise to 10 million by 2050, antimicrobial resistance is one of the biggest challenges facing mankind. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on this very important health issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman that antimicrobial resistance is a massive problem, and it is this Government who have taken a world leadership role in trying to focus attention on the need to reduce the use of antibiotics wherever we find it, whether that is for animals or humans. I encourage

him to seek a Backbench Business debate so that hon. Members can share their thoughts on this very important subject.

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Recent press reports suggest that the Government are moving towards agreeing a new contract for mechanised infantry vehicles with a German-led consortium without allowing any UK firms, such as General Dynamics UK in my constituency, to have the opportunity to tender for that work. May we have a debate or statement from a Minister so that we can understand the Government's thinking on procurement? As we approach Brexit, businesses need reassurance and support.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am not aware of the specific example that the hon. Gentleman gives, but I can tell him in a general sense that the Government have clear and transparent rules on procurement. We are of course big supporters of global free trade as a means of improving prosperity for all. If he would like to write to me on the specific subject, I can take it up with Ministers on his behalf.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My constituent, Julie Phillips, has been waiting for more than a year to access her civil service pension. The pension fund is using the excuse that it is waiting for information from Government Departments. May we have a statement from the Government on what assistance they can provide to allow people to access the pension that they have earned by working hard all their lives?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that anyone who is waiting for their pension should not have to wait a lengthy period. They have an absolute right to receive their pension, and if he wants to take that issue up with me separately, I can raise it with Ministers.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Last weekend, three quarters of the residents spoken to said that they were concerned about gangs of youths roaming the streets in the Quadrant in Hull North, and I saw for myself the youths on motorbikes with no vehicle plates and no helmets—and, I assume, no insurance or tax—with their faces covered, speeding on estate roads. I was told that the level of intimidation means that many elderly people are fearful of going out. We need to do something about these yobs. May we have a debate in Government time to discuss what additional powers, resources and support the police need to tackle this scourge?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear about the experience in the hon. Lady's constituency. She will be aware that the Government's new serious violence strategy, due to be published shortly, will put a far greater focus on steering young people away from a life of crime, while continuing to put together a strong law enforcement response. We are supporting communities to prevent violent crime, and we have awarded £765,000 to community groups and almost £300,000 to community projects that are working to end gang violence and exploitation.

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Previously, we have been told that the Government's serious violence strategy would be published in the spring. Yesterday, we were told that it was imminent, and today we have been

[Vicky Foxcroft]

told that it will be published soon, or shortly. I could ask for a debate on what “spring”, “imminent”, “soon” and “shortly” mean to the Government, but I am not going to do that. May we have instead a debate on the Government’s serious violence strategy, when it is published—and, I do not know, perhaps even a vote on it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady has worked closely with the Home Office in providing her thoughts on the serious violence strategy, and I pay tribute to her for that. Obviously, the Home Office is looking carefully into this, along with various stakeholders, including the police and community groups. It will be very important, when the strategy comes forward, for the House to have a chance to debate it; on that, I absolutely agree.

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): To deal with the problem of drug-driving, the police need adequate resources to allow for consistent roadside testing. Given yesterday’s unanimous vote in this House, will the Leader of the House schedule an urgent debate in Government time on what more the Government could do to support police forces in dealing with this crime?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will be aware that there are strong rules on drink-driving—

**Judith Cummins:** Drug-driving.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I beg the hon. Lady’s pardon; I misheard her. There are strong rules on how people use the roads when they are on drugs or alcohol or when they are using their mobile phones, and those rules are upheld by police forces. The Government are ensuring that police forces across the UK have access to up to £450 million of new funding that will meet their policing priorities. Of course it is an operational matter for each police force to prioritise where they see fit.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): There is a private estate in my constituency, Cwm Calon, where the developer, Redrow, has behaved in a thoroughly reprehensible and disgraceful manner in relation to residents’ legitimate complaints about the state of the communal areas on their estate. I understand that the Government intend to introduce legislation to extend the rights of freehold residents on private estates, so may we have a debate to discuss the Government’s plans?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government are bringing in new measures to protect tenants and homeowners in leasehold houses from some of the steps that developers are taking that really are there to rip off those who wish to own their own homes. We will be bringing forward legislation in those areas, so there will be opportunities for debate on those subjects.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The Aspley sewing workshop in my constituency is a fantastic example of how the arts can bring people together and reduce social isolation. Over the past eight weeks, funded by near neighbours, 39 people from different faiths and cultures have designed and made clothes, bags, cushions and toys for themselves and their children. May we have a debate in Government time on the impact that the arts can have on social cohesion?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a good point, and I am sure that we all have great examples in our own constituencies of how the arts and crafts can be a fantastic way of getting people together, often in libraries and by combining younger and older people. I commend him for raising the matter in the Chamber, and I encourage him to seek a Back-Bench debate or even an Adjournment debate, so that Members can share their own experiences.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): As I am sure that you will agree, Mr Deputy Speaker, the Open University, founded by the legendary Scottish Labour MP Jennie Lee, is a much-loved British institution, so can we have a debate on the vice-chancellor’s recent announcement of plans to restructure the OU that will involve substantial redundancies of academic staff and cuts to the curriculum that will have major implications for the OU’s research base and access to higher education for the most disadvantaged people and that will turn it from a world-leading distance education provider to a digital content provider?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the Open University for all it has done and continues to do to educate people and provide access to higher education for those too far away or trying to work and earn money at the same time. I am not aware of the changes he talks about, but I would encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can take them up directly with the Department for Education.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): A year after it closed because of financial problems, the Ladybarn community centre in my constituency has reopened, after local councillors and local residents secured new funding. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on the importance of such community hubs, and will she congratulate local residents on their achievement?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I certainly congratulate the hon. Gentleman’s constituents on their achievement in reopening the community centre. All community centres are a vital means of getting people together and addressing some of the issues that are the legacy of our late colleague Jo Cox in her loneliness commission. They provide so much to all our constituents in helping them to come together as a community and to work together to improve the lives of everybody.

## Counter-Daesh Update

12.6 pm

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** With permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to update the House on the campaign against Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary updated the House in November, he announced the liberation of the city of Raqqa from Daesh. Today, I can inform the House that Daesh has been all but destroyed as a territorial entity in Iraq and Syria, having lost over 98% of the territory it once held across both countries. The United Kingdom has led the way, alongside our allies the United States and the Government of Iraq, in creating the global coalition against Daesh, which has enabled this progress. I pay tribute to the dedication and professionalism of our armed forces, who have trained over 71,000 members of the Iraqi security forces, including the peshmerga. The RAF has launched over 1,680 airstrikes in Iraq and Syria to support counter-Daesh operations.

We must also recognise the sacrifices of our partner forces on the ground, which have sustained significant losses as they have taken back territory from Daesh, but our work is not yet done. Daesh still holds pockets of territory in Syria, and we encourage all partners, including Turkey, to remain focused on the counter-Daesh campaign and avoid actions that undermine our shared efforts. With its loss of territory, Daesh will still pose a threat as an insurgency and will continue to try to direct and inspire terrorist attacks around the world. That is why we will remain a leading member of the global coalition. We want to ensure that the international focus on Daesh the coalition has generated continues to help prevent Daesh from re-emerging elsewhere.

We will keep playing our part. In Iraq and Syria, the lasting defeat of Daesh is reliant on addressing the conditions that allowed Daesh to hold territory. We are providing humanitarian support to address basic needs in Syria and to help to rebuild communities in Iraq. In north-east Syria, in areas recently liberated from Daesh, we provide a range of life-saving assistance, where access allows. This includes restocking health facilities and providing food, shelter and water. Last October, my Department announced an additional £10 million, including funding to remove mines, provide medical consultations, improve access to clean water and provide delivery kits to ensure safety for mothers during childbirth.

We must, however, look to other areas of Syria to ensure that Daesh does not find support where Assad's brutal regime, backed by Russia, continues to wage war on its own people and deny humanitarian access to those who desperately need it. We are clear that Russia's military support of Assad has worsened the suffering of Syrians. In eastern Ghouta, it has supported regime military action, despite having declared it to be a de-escalation zone. The regime, with Russian support, has relentlessly bombarded and besieged the population of eastern Ghouta into submission, and humanitarian access and medical evacuations remain blocked. Only two aid convoys have entered eastern Ghouta in the past month, both facing delays and disruption due to ongoing shelling and attacks. Such activity is in clear violation of UN Security Council resolution 2401, which

demands that hostilities cease and allows the delivery of humanitarian aid and medical evacuations. Having voted for the resolution, Russia must use its influence to ensure compliance by the regime.

This year has seen little easing of the suffering of the Syrian population. The regime and its backers continue their devastating attacks on civilians, hospitals, schools and other civilian infrastructure, despite the best efforts of the international community. Even where hospitals' co-ordinates have been passed to the Russians by the UN, they have not been spared from attack. There have been yet more reports of alleged chemical weapons use, and by blocking the extension of the UN's joint investigative mechanism, Russia is shielding the regime from accountability.

Humanitarians, health workers and first responders all report their deliberate targeting by the regime and its backers. It is sickening that over 167 White Helmet volunteers have lost their lives as they try to rescue survivors as a result of being deliberately targeted by pro-regime forces in double-tap strikes. I commend their bravery and all that the White Helmets do to support the people of Syria. The attacks must stop.

We are doing what we can to alleviate the suffering and are focused on helping those most in need, regardless of who holds the territory. We will continue to keep that policy under review. We have committed £2.46 billion since the start of the conflict—our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis—and the UK was the third largest donor to the UN Syria appeal in 2017. By contrast, Russia gave \$5.5 million. Through the UN Security Council and the International Syria Support Group, we continue to call on all parties to uphold resolution 2401 and take all feasible precautions to protect civilians, as required under international humanitarian law.

As the conflict enters its eighth year, however, it is abundantly clear that only a lasting political settlement can end the suffering of the Syrian people and remove the root causes of extremism. The Syrian opposition have shown that they are ready for negotiations without preconditions. The regime must now stop stalling and negotiate seriously. We call upon those with influence over Assad to use it to bring him to the negotiation table and meet the Syrian opposition who have shown they are ready to negotiate. Only in that way will the conflict finally end.

In Iraq, the liberation by Iraqi forces, with coalition support, of the majority of Daesh-held territory signals a move towards a more peaceful, prosperous country. It can now begin the painstaking task of reconciling all Iraqi communities to bring a lasting peace that delivers a unified Iraq. In support, the UK has committed £237.5 million in humanitarian aid and £100 million in stabilisation support to Iraq. That includes £50 million announced by the Prime Minister during her visit last November, as well as £10 million to rebuild Iraq's counter-terrorist capacity. The UK will continue to train Iraq's security forces, enhancing their ability to respond to terrorist threats and support security sector reform. We have helped provide food to a quarter of a million people and have provided shelter to 325,000. Helping families to return to some semblance of a normal life is something the UK can be proud of. Last month, the Kuwait-hosted conference on reconstruction raised an impressive \$30 billion in pledges. Central to

[Penny Mordaunt]

helping Iraq is the implementation of business environment reforms to stabilise Iraq's economy and show that it is open for business. We will keep up the pressure for Iraqi leadership in such areas.

Clear challenges remain if Daesh is to be defeated for good, and we cannot be complacent. The public can rest assured that we are taking every necessary action to keep this country safe from Daesh and the terrorist threat, and we must not forget the danger posed to the UK from its returning fighters. As we have made clear, anyone returning from the conflict in Iraq or Syria will be investigated; where there is evidence that crimes have been committed, they must be brought to justice. Policy discussions are ongoing to ensure that happens in accordance with domestic and international frameworks, but the appropriate process will depend on individual circumstances. As a leading member of the coalition, the UK will remain unflinching in our commitment to confront, degrade and defeat Daesh. I commend this statement to the House.

12.15 pm

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement and thank her for advance sight of it. I am sure the whole House will welcome her update that Daesh has been "all but destroyed as a territorial entity" and that it has lost 98% of the territory it once held. That is testament to the bravery and commitment of those on the ground, including our Kurdish allies, who have fought so hard to expel Daesh from their homelands in northern Syria and to recapture towns such as Manbij.

I welcome the continued humanitarian support that the UK provides through the Department for International Development. Given the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the conflict in Syria, it is right that the UK has played its part by getting humanitarian aid as quickly as possible to affected areas and by channelling substantial financial resources into helping to save lives in the years since the conflict began. I join the Secretary of State in condemning the appalling attacks on humanitarian workers across Syria, including on the 167 White Helmet volunteers who have lost their lives. Humanitarian workers must never be a target in conflict. Will the Secretary of State update the House on what steps she is taking to ensure full humanitarian access, especially in those parts of Syria that are now changing territorial control, both around Afrin and Ghouta?

I note that the Secretary of State warned Turkey that it must avoid "actions that undermine our shared efforts", but is that really the strongest language that the Government will use to condemn Turkey's incursion into northern Syria? That incursion is neither legitimate nor justified, has no basis in international law and should never have been allowed in the first place. This Government have stood by while Turkey and its band of rebel militias have marched into another country on the pretext of combating terrorism, while they have seized Afrin, while they have forced thousands to flee and while they have pulled down Kurdish statues. Does the Secretary of State agree that it cannot be right that this Government have not offered even a word of real criticism or condemnation, even as those same Turkish forces now advance and threaten to attack towns such as Manbij

and seize those same Kurdish homelands? The Government must not abandon our Kurdish allies, who have given so much in the fight against Daesh. Will she condemn Turkey's aggression unreservedly today?

One particularly sad story to emerge from the Turkish assault on Afrin is the death of UK national, Anna Campbell, who went to Syria last year to volunteer to fight with Kurdish forces against Daesh and insisted on being sent to the Afrin front at the outset of the Turkish assault. She was killed by a Turkish airstrike on 15 March, shortly before the fall of Afrin. She is one of eight British volunteers killed serving with the YPJ, the Kurdish women's protection unit, and the first woman. While her father, Dirk, has expressed pride in her bravery and sacrifice, he has been angered in recent days by the Government's inability to help repatriate her body for burial. Will the Secretary of State tell us what the Government are doing to help retrieve the body of this young woman who did her part in the fight against Daesh?

The United States has made it clear that the objective of coalition forces in Syria is to carry out what it calls "stabilisation activities" in "liberated areas" in the north of the country and to use those areas as a base to achieve the eventual transition of Syria from the Assad regime. Whatever one thinks of those activities, one thing is clear: they are a million miles away from the mandate for military action given to the Government by this House in 2015, which was exclusively to stop Syria becoming a safe haven for Daesh. Is it not time for the Government to come back to this House, set out their new strategy in Syria and seek a fresh mandate?

**Penny Mordaunt:** On behalf of all in this House, may I say that our thoughts are very much with Ms Campbell's family at this incredibly difficult time. I am sure hon. Members will have heard her father's incredibly moving tribute to her—she was an inspirational young woman. Obviously, we cannot provide consular support in Syria, but we are in touch with the family and will do everything we can to be of service to them, including in trying to repatriate Anna's body. This is a very difficult situation, but I reassure all hon. Members that we are in touch and will do everything we can to bring her home.

On the wider issue of Afrin, we recognise Turkey's legitimate security concerns, but we would support de-escalation of the situation. It is vital that we continue to defeat Daesh and that we continue to have greater stability in the area so that we can move to a political process, which is the only way this horrendous war will end. The indirect effect of what Turkey is doing is to remove fighting resource from the Euphrates valley area, which is clearly not beneficial to the coalition's efforts in defeating Daesh.

I apologise to the House for the length of my statement, but I wanted to get on record some of the humanitarian atrocities that have taken place since the Foreign Secretary's statement last year. The activities in eastern Ghouta are particularly shocking. The Foreign Office and DFID have made a continual combined effort to get access, whether it be for aid convoys or for the medical evacuation of casualties, particularly to remove children from the area. Despite the agreements, and despite the opportunities we were told they would be given, the partners we are

working with on the ground have found it incredibly difficult to do that—one aid convoy was shelled after being given permission to go in.

We will continue to press for full humanitarian access to eastern Ghouta, and we are also looking at other areas of Syria that may be about to suffer a similar fate. We are trying to ensure that we do everything we can to protect civilians.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): The Secretary of State is a personal friend of mine, so I do not mean this in any way to reflect on her abilities, but I am surprised that a statement with so much military content is not being made by a Defence Minister and that we do not appear to have a Defence Minister present on the Front Bench. She will forgive me if I ask some defence-oriented questions.

First, can the Secretary of State confirm that the vast majority of the large number of RAF sorties have been in Iraq, rather than Syria, because there were few forces on the ground in Syria, other than the Kurds, whom we felt we could support? Secondly, does she recognise that the opposition in Syria, with the exception of the Kurds, has been dominated from beginning to end by Islamists, although they are not all from Daesh? Finally, will she acknowledge that we need a realistic strategy whereby we get away from demanding a political settlement when, in reality, our only allies in Syria—the Kurds—are now being attacked by a fellow member of NATO, namely Turkey?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I will do my best to answer the defence matters raised by my right hon. Friend. The key Departments involved in our efforts take it in turns to deliver an update to the House. No disrespect is meant to him or to the House by there not being a Defence Minister at the Dispatch Box. As the Government's humanitarian lead, I am taking this opportunity to focus on the humanitarian atrocities that have been committed.

I can confirm to my right hon. Friend that the vast majority of airstrikes have been in Iraq—1,362 airstrikes have taken place—which is largely due to the nature of the campaign. The campaign has differed at different stages, from having a named target when an aircraft takes off to carrying out more opportunist surveillance and not having a target as the aircraft gets airborne—that is how the campaign unfolded, as opposed to the factor he mentioned.

We remain concerned that Afrin is indirectly diverting resource away from the main effort against Daesh, and I confirm that we still believe that a political settlement is the only way forward.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of her statement. We join the tributes to Anna Campbell and offer our condolences to her family.

This is a helpful statement, and I recognise the Government's contribution. Does the Minister believe that the liberation of Raqqa means the head of the snake has finally been cut off? If so, how much longer will UK military involvement continue? I agree that a negotiated settlement is ultimately needed, so what contribution does continued UK military presence make to that?

I welcome DFID's contribution. Supporting refugee camps is particularly important, but so is support for refugees who make their way here. How many more refugees are the UK Government willing to accept here in the UK, and will they support the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil)?

How are the Department's resources being used to support long-term rebuilding, and what kind of strategy is in place for that? Finally, is the Minister making sure that any UK spending that is counted towards the 0.7% aid target is not also counted towards the 2% defence spending target or otherwise appropriated by her colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Raqqa was always described as the head of the snake but, as I said in my statement, the job is not yet done. We need to complete the job there, and we also need to ensure that Daesh is not emerging elsewhere. Our commitment will be driven by our progress in the campaign, and any further action will be done on a case-by-case basis. Our armed forces are making an enormous difference, not just through the airstrikes but through surveillance, and we have saved an enormous number of lives with our contribution.

It is our policy to try to support refugees as close to their country of origin as possible. We are doing a tremendous amount in neighbouring countries, and we are grateful to the likes of Jordan and Lebanon for their huge efforts. I am aware of the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill, and I have had lengthy discussions with the Home Office and other parts of government. I am keen to see whether the existing rules are in any way not fit for any of the cases we have. I have asked for detail of all the cases, including the numbers.

Although I continue to have meetings with the Home Office, the Bill's intention is that a child, say, who has been injured or is undergoing medical treatment, and where it would not be appropriate for them to be anywhere other than here, can be reunited with their family. We have had cases in which that has happened, so the existing rules are not inadequate, but I will thoroughly look at this with the Home Office to see whether there is anything else we can do. It is our policy not to contribute towards reconstruction unless progress is made on a political process. On the double counting that the hon. Gentleman talks about, different bodies mark our homework on our NATO contribution and our 0.7%, so there are no shenanigans as to what is counting towards one thing or the other. He will know that there are clear rules on what constitutes the 0.7%, and that cannot be anything to do with the military.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her statement. Given the incredible role that the Kurds in the autonomous Kurdish region played in trying to defeat Daesh, will she do more, on behalf of the Government, to recognise the genocide of the Kurdish people, to recognise their demands for independence and to stop the bullying by the Iraqi Government of the Kurds in the autonomous region?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that—

**Robert Halfon:** Friend.

**Penny Mordaunt:** Yes, sorry. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East has been in discussions with both Turkey and, yesterday, with two members of the Kurdish opposition. We are very much pressing for a de-escalation of what is happening in Afrin, in part because it is distracting from the effort in fighting Daesh.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): I join the Secretary of State in paying tribute to the bravery and dedication of all those who have helped to defeat Daesh on the ground and to liberate those whom it enslaved. Evidence of that is to be found in an exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall this week, where the stories of Yazidi women who survived Daesh's attempts at genocide, and who suffered sexual enslavement and rape, are told in the form of their words and art, as they seek to come to terms with the harrowing experience they went through. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what further efforts are being made to collect evidence of the genocide and crimes against humanity that Daesh committed, so that those responsible can finally all be brought to justice?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for publicising that amazing exhibition. I know that many colleagues from both sides of the House have visited it, and it was incredibly moving. It is absolutely right that we capture and record the immense suffering and cruelty that has taken place across both countries throughout the duration of this conflict. Clear processes are in place for that to be done. It is also vital that we are monitoring the existing humanitarian atrocities that are being perpetrated, not only by Daesh but by other groups, which I have alluded to in my statement. In future updates to this House, we may be able to share more information about the evidence that has managed to be collected, both photographic and forensic.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): On 17 September last year, the threat level for our country was reduced from "critical", which meant that an attack was imminent, to "severe", which means that an attack by terrorists is highly likely. The senior Metropolitan police counter-terrorism officer in our country has said that that threat is likely to last for five years. We all see the threat level on the Annunciators, but we get very complacent. How can the Government help the public not to become complacent about the threat we face over such a long time?

**Penny Mordaunt:** Let me take this opportunity, as I am sure the whole House would want me to, to pay tribute to the work of our security services, our police, the support services that work with them and our military in keeping the UK safe. They do a tremendous job; we know that they foil an enormous number of threats against this country. We all, as a nation, need to remain vigilant. I commend and point out to hon. Members the social media campaign that the Home Office has been running in order to ask people to report things that they find suspicious and to ensure that people are remaining vigilant all the time. When these information campaigns come out, all Members of this House, through their media channels, can help to promote them. We must all stay alert and resilient, while not letting this affect our way of life.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): It is good to hear the Secretary of State set out the difficulty in getting aid through to the people of eastern Ghouta that is caused by the crimes committed daily by Russia and Syria, but simply publicising it and arguing against it is not proving sufficient, and nor can anyone believe that it will. So are the Government prepared to consider working with allies in the region to guarantee the safety of aid convoys to Ghouta—or to wherever Syria and Russia target next—in order to say to the regime, "This will get through. We are giving it military protection. You must not shoot those convoys down"?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I have looked at this, both in my current role and when I was a Defence Minister. One of the incredibly frustrating things is the limitation in our ability to offer protection to humanitarian workers and aid convoys and, in certain cases, to civilians on the ground. We need new things in our toolbox if we are not to be faced with these situations again. A few weeks ago, I launched, along with my US counterpart, a new fund designed to bring forward technology that will help us to protect people in conflict situations, and to help us do the things that I know this House gets frustrated that we cannot do. This fund is a call-out for technology innovations and other things that will help us to protect civilians in conflict. It is called "Creating Hope in Conflict", and I urge all Members who may know organisations, entrepreneurs, and tech specialists who work in this field to look at that to see whether they can help us on some of these issues.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): It is very encouraging to hear this statement and it is quite a vindication for those of us who accepted the reasoning put forward for the UK to be involved in military action back in 2015, which was so eloquently set out at that time by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). It is right that we are now moving the focus on to reconstruction and therefore that this statement is being made by the Department for International Development. Will my right hon. Friend outline to the House what role she sees her Department playing in trying to rebuild communities, as the long-term strategy of dealing with Daesh is to rebuild civil society and better states within both Syria and Iraq that prevent the issues that led us to this point?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I thank my hon. Friend for that. We made the argument in this House, and the House agreed, that this campaign was taking place across both countries and that it made no sense that we could not use the nearest asset, if it was a British one, to protect civilians in Syria. I was very grateful to the House when it allowed us to cross that border. That decision has saved lives, and helped us to protect civilians and make the best use of the assets that the coalition has. On Iraq, we are doing a huge amount to support the goal of a unified Iraq. I mentioned in my statement some of the resource we are leveraging to enable communities to come together to support civil society and some of those practical things we are doing. On Syria, we will not be involved in any reconstruction there until there is a political settlement to that situation, but, obviously, we are trying to get humanitarian relief through to those people who are in need.

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): May I echo the tributes to Anna Campbell and the condolences to her family expressed by others in this debate? May I also welcome the regular updates that the Secretary of State and other Ministers have given to this House? It is essential that Members should have an understanding of the role British forces are playing abroad and of what British aid is contributing.

Will the Secretary of State confirm more clearly what I think she has already said, which is that she believes that Turkish action in Afrin is damaging the fight against Daesh? Is she able to say whether the International Committee of the Red Cross is able to gain access? There are concerns that the Turkish Red Crescent is not able to do that in a credible way. Would she like to use this opportunity to confirm that, notwithstanding the serious issues that Oxfam and other agencies of that sort have, this is a good example of where they are making an outstanding contribution to dealing with a real humanitarian crisis?

**Penny Mordaunt:** It is absolutely indirectly affecting the campaign against Daesh, particularly in respect of removing resource from the Euphrates valley area. The ICRC does not yet have access, in large part because improvised explosive devices have been laid in the area. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East has requested that the ICRC be granted access. The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) is right to say that we work with an enormous number of partner organisations. Indeed, although Oxfam is not directly funded by us, it is doing incredibly important work in the region and helping to save lives. We owe the people who are working in very dangerous situations an enormous debt of gratitude.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Nearly two years ago, in April 2016, the House, including Government and Opposition Members, voted for the treatment of the Yazidis and Christians to be classified as genocide. Will the Secretary of State update the House on when she thinks the British Government will recognise that treatment as genocide?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I share the hon. Lady's concern. The atrocities that have been committed against those people are horrific. As she will know, to classify something as genocide is not something that the Government can do—there is an international process to classify something as genocide—but I would be happy to update her, perhaps by letter, on what the timetable for that process might look like.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I raised the issue of Afrin with the Foreign Secretary some weeks ago and sought his assurance about what discussions he has had with the Turkish Government

and our NATO allies about how they are safeguarding the law of armed conflict in relation to civilians in Afrin. Will the Secretary of State update the House on what discussions the Government have had with their Turkish counterparts on upholding the cornerstone of NATO policy and the law of armed conflict, and on securing civilians?

**Penny Mordaunt:** The Foreign Office has ongoing discussions. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East was in Turkey last week and spoke to the Deputy Prime Minister.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State mentions the suffering of the Syrian people; does she agree with the constituents who came to see me at my surgery last Friday that that suffering has been compounded by the British Government's shameful timidity regarding Turkish aggression in northern Syria?

**The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt):** Perhaps the vote in 2013 had something to do with it.

**Penny Mordaunt:** Yes; my right hon. Friend points to the answer. I think hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber regret that we took military action off the table in the vote in 2013. It was not a vote on taking military action; indeed, there was an undertaking that if military action was sought, the Government would come back to the House and ask it to vote on that. What we did that day was remove the option for this country to take military action. That is a lesson that sometimes inaction is not the right answer.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Pasg hapus iawn i chi—a very happy Easter to you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** And to you.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Thank you.

After turning a blind eye to Turkey's disgraceful offensive against the Kurds in Afrin province, will the British Government now unreservedly condemn the Turkish army's intention to extend the offensive into Idlib, Manbij and Kobane, and all the way to the Iraq border? As Turkey is now directly undermining a counter-Daesh operation, should not the British Government at least stop selling arms to that country?

**Penny Mordaunt:** I have already said a great deal about Afrin. I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of the Government as turning a blind eye to this—far from it. Just last week my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East spoke with members of the Turkish Government about these matters.

## Social Mobility Commission

### EDUCATION COMMITTEE

#### *Select Committee statement*

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** We now come to the Select Committee statement. Robert Halfon will speak on his subject for up to 10 minutes, during which no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of the statement, I will call Members to ask questions on the subject of the statement and call Robert Halfon to respond to them in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

12.45 pm

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** When the Prime Minister made her first speech outside Downing Street, she spoke of the importance of

“fighting against the burning injustice”

in our society and pledged to lead a Government that would make Britain

“a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us.”

The role of the Social Mobility Commission, formerly led by Alan Milburn, was to shine a light on injustice, but in December, Alan Milburn resigned, alongside his three fellow commissioners. He believed that the Government were

“unable to devote the necessary energy and focus to the social mobility agenda”.

Social justice is a key issue facing our country and there remain great social injustices. The Social Mobility Commission reported that only one in eight children from low-income backgrounds is likely to become a high-income earner as an adult. At the current rate of progress, it will take 120 years before disadvantaged young people are as likely as their better-off peers to achieve A-level or equivalent qualifications. Just 39% of pupils on free school meals achieve A to C in English and maths at GCSE, compared with 67% of all other pupils. The Social Mobility Commission’s state of the nation reports were vital in drawing attention to those injustices, because the list of inequalities is expansive—they are not just in education, but exist across the policy spectrum, from housing to health.

It is wrong that the membership of the commission was allowed to dwindle to the extent that the remaining commissioners felt that it had become unviable. Given the Prime Minister’s commitment to social justice, it seems extraordinary that the commissioners felt that the Government were not listening. How can a commission that is designed to report on and address social injustice do its job if it is not listened to by those in the corridors of power?

The Education Committee is responsible for holding the pre-appointment hearing with the Government’s preferred candidate for the chair of the commission, and we look forward to doing that shortly. Because of that role, we decided to investigate the circumstances that led to the resignation of the commissioners and to consider how the commission could be made more effective. Our report was published last week. I pay tribute to my fellow Committee members—the hon. Member

for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) is present—for their work on this important matter, along with our hard-working Committee staff and officials.

The commission can be made more effective with minor legislative changes. It should have the responsibility to publish social justice impact assessments on domestic policies. It needs the power to advise actively on social justice issues, not just when Ministers request advice. There must be a minimum membership of the commission so that its membership cannot dwindle in the same way that it did over the past couple of years. The name of the commission should be changed to the Social Justice Commission, to reflect more accurately its role.

We also recommend that the Government create a body at the heart of Government to drive forward and implement recommendations and co-ordinate across Government. It would be led by a Minister in the Cabinet Office, who would be given specific responsibility for leading cross-Government work. The Minister should have responsibility for a dedicated unit with a remit to tackle social injustice. The body would also be the way that the commission would report into Government. The combination of a strengthened commission and a body at the heart of Downing Street to drive forward recommendations would better demonstrate the Government’s commitment to social justice.

Alan Milburn told us that the Government “lacked the headspace and the bandwidth to really match the rhetoric of healing social division with the reality.”

Baroness Shephard spoke of delays and blank walls as far as appointing new commissioners was concerned and concluded that there was, “No point at all”.

The Government must not let this happen again when the new commission is appointed. If the Prime Minister and the Department for Education are to take social justice seriously—I welcome the Education Whip on to the Treasury Bench, as Ministers were unable to attend this statement today—the important work produced by the commission must be listened to, and the Government must implement proposals for change. We are looking forward to our pre-appointment hearing for the chair of the new commission. The Committee will be keeping a close eye on the appointments process for the other commissioners to ensure that the last process, described by Alan Milburn as farcical, is not repeated.

An effective Social Justice Commission, to monitor and report on progress on tackling social injustice, working in tandem with an implementation body at the heart of Government, could really begin to heal some of the great divides in our country. Only then will we give the most disadvantaged in our society the chance to reach and to climb the ladder of opportunity and live in a country that works for all of us.

**Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind):** I am very pleased to hear the report of the Chair of the Education Committee. These economic and educational divisions were deep in our society when I was young, which was a very long time ago, and they are still here today. My view has always been that these things develop in primary education. Is the Committee looking seriously at how we can avoid those divisions opening up at a very young age?

**Robert Halfon:** The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly important point. Our Committee is dedicated to looking at social injustice. It is a key aim of the Education Committee. Only yesterday, we had a discussion about

early intervention and life chances—about intervening very early on to ensure that social injustice is not carried through later on in life. The answer, therefore, is, yes.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend mentioned that one in eight children from low-income backgrounds is likely to become a high-income earner. What is the percentage for the rest of children—what percentage becomes high-income earners—so that we have a good comparison?

**Robert Halfon**: I do not have the answer off the top of my head, but I am happy to write to my hon. Friend.

## Backbench Business

### Autism

12.52 pm

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes that World Autism Awareness Week 2018 runs from 26 March to 2 April; believes that there is a lack of understanding of the needs of autistic people and their families; and calls on the Government to improve the support provided to autistic children in school and to autistic adults in or seeking employment, to reduce waiting times for autism diagnosis, and to promote a public awareness campaign so people can make the changes necessary for the UK to become autism-friendly.

I welcome to the Front Bench the Minister for Care, who will be responding to the debate. I gather that she chaired an autism accountability meeting on Monday, so she brings knowledge of that to the debate, and I look forward to hearing what she has to say. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate during World Autism Awareness Week itself.

I want to put on record my great pride at chairing the all-party group on autism, which is a really good cross-party group that embraces people from both sides of the Chamber. It is important that we continue this debate on a cross-party basis because, as we must remind ourselves, in each Member's constituency we probably have approximately 1,000 autistic people. The accepted statistic is about one in 100 people. This is therefore a subject that we share between us, and one on which we can make good progress when we all work together.

I am also aware that many Members have family members who are on the autism spectrum. I wish to put on record my thanks to colleagues who have shared their own experiences, because those experiences add to the body of knowledge and to the effective way in which we can improve situations for people with autism and their families.

The fact that this is such an important issue is reflected particularly in the National Autistic Society's Too Much Information campaign, with which many of us will be familiar. Only 16% of autistic people and their family members think that the public really understand autism in any meaningful way. As a result, an alarming number of people—79% of autistic people and 70% of families—feel socially isolated. At a time when our Prime Minister has put in place a Minister for loneliness, we must not forget the isolation that can be caused for autistic people through behaviour or a lack of understanding in this area. Half of autistic people and their families sometimes do not even go out because they are worried about how people will react to autism, while 28% of autistic people have been asked to leave a public space because of behaviour associated with their autism.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the right hon. Lady agree that the situation is also very frustrating for those who fail to get a diagnosis of autism, particularly when their local authority is not able to provide one, or says that it does not have the resources to do so? Even if a person pays privately for one, the local authority will not accept that as a diagnosis.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, and I will come on to diagnosis a bit later in my speech.

May I put it on record that while many people associate autism with mental health, it is in fact a developmental condition—a lifelong developmental condition—and not necessarily a mental health condition? Autistic people are as likely to suffer from a mental health problem as anybody else—any neurotypical person. I really want to make sure that nobody in this House ever confuses that, and I hope that that puts the record straight.

I wish to touch on the Autism Act 2009. Almost 10 years ago, I was very privileged to draw No. 1 in the ballot for private Members' Bills and then to take through the Bill that became that Act. We are coming up to the 10th anniversary of the Act, which is really important. A key element of the Act was to mandate the Government to produce an adult autism strategy, and the 10-year anniversary will coincide with a year in which that strategy is up for review. The all-party group is working towards holding to account every Government Department involved, and making sure that their feet are held to the fire, because this affects almost every area of public life and public policy. Ahead of the review, I want all areas of our Government to consider how they can better support people with autism and people on the autism spectrum.

It is also important to look at the good that that Act has done. Almost 10 years on, the National Autistic Society had a look at this, and it is worth reflecting on the fact that autism really is on the agenda now for an awful lot of people, and locally as well. Almost everyone is aware of autism. NAS polling showed that 99.5% of people were aware of autism, and almost every council—93% of them—has an autism lead.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): The right hon. Lady does the House a great service by bringing forward this debate on autism. Can she tell me—perhaps she does not have the figures—about employers' attitude to employing people with autism? Are there any statistics on that?

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** The hon. Gentleman anticipates another bit of my speech. That is really important, because people with autism are disproportionately not being taken off the unemployment register. In fact only yesterday, with the all-party group for disability, I had a joint meeting with the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills to look at the problems and consider how, working with employers' organisations and the Government, we can try to improve the situation.

More councils now include autism in their joint strategic needs assessment, and almost every local area has a diagnostic pathway—those that do not will know who they are, but all but three are covered. That is really significant progress, but let us face it there is not a person in the House who does not know that we need to make more progress in this area, so I do not say that with any sense of complacency whatsoever.

I want to touch on a few areas, but I have only limited time. I have been very impressed by the number of Members on both sides of the House who have put in to speak, and it is really important that I hear from them.

I will start by talking briefly about education. My hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) and for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) recently chaired an inquiry into autism and education under the umbrella of the APPG. They did some fantastic work, looking at how the education system in England currently works for children. The inquiry involved evidence sessions and surveys, and took additional evidence from more than 3,000 parents, professionals and people on the autism spectrum. It found that children are being held back from achieving their full potential because they are autistic. In our surveys, nearly 70% of parents told us that they had waited for more than six months for support at school, and 50% had waited for more than a year.

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on leading this debate. As a distinguished former Cabinet Minister, she could be drinking piña coladas in her garden in Amersham, yet she dedicates her life to helping with autism. Is she aware that autistic children are four times more likely to be permanently excluded than other children?

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** My right hon. Friend, who chairs the Education Committee with distinction, is absolutely right. That is why I am so pleased that this year, for the first time, the Government are putting a compulsory autism module into initial teacher training. That is significant, and I hope that my right hon. Friend's Committee might look into that provision.

The inquiry of my hon. Friends the Members for Bexhill and Battle and for Lewes also found that four in 10 families were initially turned away when asking for the extra help that their child needs. To address these challenges, we have recommended that the Department for Education develops an autism strategy. That call has been enthusiastically taken up by the National Autistic Society and Ambitious about Autism, which launched the Held Back campaign to support the report's recommendations.

More than 20,000 people, including 70 Members of this House and the House of Lords, have signed an open letter to the Secretary of State for Education calling for the report's recommendations to be implemented. It is really important that Lord Agnew, the Under-Secretary of State for the school system, comes forward with the Department's response, as it has confirmed that it will respond to the inquiry. It will be good to hear what it is doing to make improvements in this area.

I turn to the autism employment gap, which is a major problem.

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Lady for the work that she does on the APPG, which is much needed and welcomed. I agreed with what she said about children in school, and I think that everybody here knows of such cases. My constituent, Lucy, has a bright seven-year-old son who is in year 4 but is working at year 1 level because he has not had his diagnosis. That an absolute disgrace for the child, who is missing out on his education, but Lucy also wrote to me to say, "I am exhausted". She is fighting with all her energy, but says,

"I still have fight in me, but the whole family is exhausted" because they feel that there is a barrier at every step.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** That is a common theme for parents who face this continuous battle. That is why we need to provide assistance. Every Member must know which routes they can take to provide as much assistance as possible.

**Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab):** Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** This will probably be the last intervention, I am afraid.

**Mr Howarth:** I am grateful. I hesitate to intervene on the right hon. Lady because she is making a powerful point, but before she moves on to employment, will she agree that any new system has to take account of the frustration that parents feel as they attempt to get appropriate support for their children? In some cases, that frustration is overpowering.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I agree entirely. The right hon. Gentleman shows that there is great understanding of the issue on both sides of the House.

Some 60% of employers worry about getting support for an autistic employee wrong, and 60% of do not know who to ask for advice or support about employing an autistic person. Given the huge success of the Government's Access to Work programme, it is a real shame that there is not better awareness of it among employers. I want to hear about that from Front Benchers. The NAS recommends that we ensure that Jobcentre Plus staff, work coaches and disability employment advisers all receive training in how to deal with autistic people.

**Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con):** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** This really is the last time.

**Alex Burghart:** I apologise to the House that I am losing my voice. My right hon. Friend is being extremely generous with her time. She quite rightly points out that Access to Work is a valuable initiative that helps people, but in my experience it helps people once they already have a job. Does she agree that it would be wonderful if that sort of initiative and expertise were brought forward to help people with autism to prepare for work so that they were less intimidated by applying for jobs?

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I am also afraid that I am slightly losing my voice; I am sounding a bit Fenella Fielding. It is important that the Government promote the positives of employing autistic people and ensure that advice about supporting autistic people at work is made available to employers.

In the recent Command Paper "Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability", the Government acknowledged that autistic people were one of the groups that struggled most with employment. I would welcome the Minister addressing this point when she winds up, as well as giving us an update on the potential progress towards putting autism into the labour force survey, which would be an important step.

I want to touch on three other points: criminal justice; diagnosis waiting times; and access to democracy. The subject of people with autism in the criminal justice system does not often get the profile that it deserves.

Because of the nature of autism, autistic people can find themselves being caught up in the criminal justice system inadvertently. We need to work hard to ensure that we are doing all that we can to support people not to enter the system in the first place, and we also need to get it right by ensuring that we do the best we can by those people when they do enter the system.

I have always been very impressed by Feltham young offenders institution, which has achieved accreditation from the NAS as an autism-friendly institution. I understood that 20 other prisons were going through accreditation. Will the Minister update us on what is happening with the autism accreditation system? Furthermore, we would like to see training for professionals across the criminal justice system. Will she take that point on board and give us an update on what progress the Government are making? The APPG will be launching a call for evidence on criminal justice over the next few weeks and I urge every Member of this House to get in touch with the secretary of the group if they have case studies and examples of autism and the criminal justice system to share.

As the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) mentioned in his intervention, waiting times for diagnosis are critical. Diagnosis is a critical milestone for people on the spectrum, but individuals are having to wait far too long for an autism diagnosis. Research by Goldsmiths and City, University of London, shows that the average wait for children for an autism diagnosis is over three and a half years, while adults receive a diagnosis after around two years. The Government have committed to record and publish waiting times. Recording will start in April and publication will begin next year. That is incredibly important, and I hope that the Minister will update us on that.

Finally, I want to talk about autism and access to democracy. I sit on the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, and our inquiry into the work of the Electoral Commission has just touched on this subject. Research suggests that voter turnout among those with a disability is much lower than that of the general population, and the Government, rightly, have a duty to close that gap and ensure that everyone is able to cast their vote. There are special access requirements around buildings, and the Government also commission guides on voting for people with different disabilities, such as those with a learning disability. However, I would welcome clarity from the Government on whether the adjustments that autistic people may need are considered in the Electoral Commission guidance, and on whether the Government are planning any autism-friendly guides for voters on the spectrum.

Autism affects so many areas of government that it is difficult to address them all in one speech. I am being held to about 15 minutes, but I could stand here for the next half hour and opine on where we need to go, what is happening, and where we need to have the drivers.

I want finally to return to World Autism Awareness Week and the reason why we are all here today. Autistic people tell the National Autistic Society that the thing that would make the biggest difference to their day-to-day lives would be if people understood autism. I have a personal aim that all those who play a role in public services, no matter where in this country, should be trained to appreciate the challenges faced by autistic people in the workplace, in schools, on public transport,

[*Dame Cheryl Gillan*]

and in other public places. If we all show just a little more awareness of how autism can affect others, we can make great strides in making autistic people feel at home and more welcome in all our communities.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I call Barry Sheerman on a seven-minute limit.

1.10 pm

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I got involved with the autism cause, if I can call it that, very largely because of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (*Dame Cheryl Gillan*), who really paved the way with her private Member's Bill and everything she has done with the all-party parliamentary group on autism. When I was Chair of the Education Committee and then the Children, Schools and Families Committee for 10 years, we looked at special educational needs in some depth, but I never persuaded my Committee to drill down into the autism area strongly enough, so I always had a guilty conscience about that.

After finishing as Chair of the Select Committee and indeed finding that one of the members of my large family is on the autism spectrum, I was energised to get more involved. Working harmoniously with the all-party group, I and others founded the Westminster Commission on Autism. We have already, in a very short period, produced two reports. One of those, "A spectrum of obstacles: an inquiry into access to healthcare for autistic people", has already brought about substantial changes in how people perceive such healthcare. We found out how worried people on the autism spectrum were about going into an A&E, with the busyness, the lights and the noise, or even going to a GP. Access to healthcare is strictly limited for many people on the autism spectrum. I am delighted that the report has had such a great influence.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that initiatives such as the autism hour promoted by the National Autistic Society last year—where shops opened for an hour with their lights dimmed and drew attention to how, exactly as he describes, going into a busy place can be difficult—are very good ways to raise public awareness?

**Mr Sheerman:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Indeed, I would urge Members of Parliament to encourage autism-friendly environments in their constituencies. Having soft lighting and not too much noise can make a very big difference to accessibility.

This is World Autism Awareness Week. As I said, the Westminster Commission on Autism works very closely with the all-party group. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham is a member of the commission. Yesterday, we were proud to launch a report called, "A spectrum of harmful interventions for autism". Many people in this country—very wicked people—play on people's stress, worries and concerns and sell treatments for autism that really should be banned. They use social media. It is a disgrace in our

society that people prey on very stressed families with children or other members with autism. We took evidence on this, and it was really upsetting to hear about the kinds of treatments and therapies that were on offer. It is a very interesting area, because it is unclear whether it is covered by the food regulator or the medical regulator, so no one is quite sure who to complain to. Our report has the answer. It is very important, and I hope that hon. Members in all parts of the House will promulgate it.

The most serious thing that we have to address is what happens when someone—usually both parents, but a mother nearly always knows earlier—notices very early on that something is not quite right. Then there is the frustration of not knowing who to talk to, where to go and where the support is. I am not going to be political at all, but one little thing is that children's services are deeply under pressure in every local authority.

**Mark Tami:** Does my hon. Friend agree that another crucial time is when someone moves from children's services to adult services? That can be a very traumatic period if it is not handled properly.

**Mr Sheerman:** Absolutely. All my experience suggests that most work now needs to be put into early family support, in every way. People feel so isolated and bereft of support, and bereft of knowledge. Thanks to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham and others, there is a lot of information out there, but how do people get it when they have never even really understood what autism means?

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I increasingly get families with autistic children in my surgeries complaining about bad housing conditions in the private rented sector, with overcrowding, really appalling conditions, infestations, noise and so on, but there is also a problem with temporary accommodation and families being moved on. This creates particular stress for autistic children. Does my hon. Friend agree that those making housing assessments should take more account of autism?

**Mr Sheerman:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Interestingly, as has been said, this goes right across the whole spectrum. Of course, having access to healthcare is important. Access to education is important, especially when there is a very supportive environment for a child on the autism spectrum at primary school and then going to "big school" is a very big challenge for them. We need to get this right, and support families to support the child at that time.

Recently, many Members were part of the campaign for Lauri Love, a severely autistic, wonderful young man who was in danger of being extradited to the United States. Anyone who met Lauri Love and understood his condition was sympathetic. At the moment, it looks as though we have been successful in supporting Lauri, so that is a great victory.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I was actually at Glasgow University at the same time as Lauri Love, and I remember him well from those days. The situation that my hon. Friend mentions is critical and exactly what we now need to tackle in the UK. We need a national approach, including engaging with the devolved Administrations, to ensure that there is a

proper policy framework to safeguard the rights of autistic people across the workplace and in other forms of public life.

**Mr Sheerman:** My hon. Friend is right. We need to spread the knowledge. We need to get the Government, right across the piece—there almost ought to be a Minister for autism—making sure that seamlessly, across all Departments, there is a high level of awareness.

On early diagnosis, the commission heard evidence on what happens in Sweden. Sweden seems to be one of the places that one looks to: I believe that the professor we interviewed was the man who actually minted the expression, “the autism spectrum”. The evidence we were given was that every child in Sweden is evaluated to see whether they are on the spectrum very early on—at seven years of age, I think—so why not every child in the United Kingdom? That is what we should be looking for—early diagnosis and early support of the family.

A lot of people on the autism spectrum fall foul of the criminal justice system. A person on the autism spectrum can get on a bus in a normal way in the morning, then if the bus is cancelled or something else happens that disturbs their routine, that has a very big impact on them. They may behave rather antisocially. The police may be called and they end up in a cell. I have heard this story so many times. The criminal justice system has to look very carefully at the needs of people on the autism spectrum.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman has seen the National Autistic Society’s latest film, “Too Much Information”, which is about exactly that problem of somebody being overwhelmed when they are travelling on public transport.

**Mr Sheerman:** The right hon. Lady knows that I accept that wholeheartedly.

I want to finish by saying that it is wonderful that we are having a short debate on autism, but we have to keep coming back to this. It is a very important part of all our lives as Members of Parliament. We must know more, do more and help more, and if that is part of what we manage to achieve this week, I will be very proud of this House.

1.19 pm

**Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Every time we have a debate on autism, we bring the issue forward, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) pointed out.

As someone who has family experience of this—my wonderful 18-year-old son, who has been through the mill, has Asperger’s—constituents are starting to contact me and come and talk to me. They are stepping out into the light and saying, “How do I cope?” Having these debates is genuinely giving confidence to families, particularly mothers, to ask for help and ask how they might find support. As ever, I add my continued gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for all the work she is doing.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** My hon. Friend gives me a good opportunity to say to all those people who email me and contact me on social media that I cannot deal with

all the questions and issues that come into my inbox, but I encourage those people to contact their MPs directly, because it is their own MPs who can help them—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. This is a very important debate. I put a seven-minute limit on speeches to try to give everybody a chance to speak. Given the interventions, I will have to drop the limit for Members lower down the list. I do not think it is fair. Interventions have to be short, and Members should think about whether they need to intervene—especially when they are summing up at the end.

**Mrs Trevelyan:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I want to discuss waiting times for diagnosis, which are getting better. In the case of my son James, we could not get any kind of diagnosis within the NHS and had to go private. There is not yet the capacity within local areas to ensure that when there is something different with a child early on, there is somewhere to go. I contend the use of language by the hon. Member for Huddersfield—it is not that there is something not right, but that there is something different, and that use of language is important. I say that as someone who has shouted at a lot of people when my son has had a meltdown and said, “If you don’t understand what’s going on, could you kindly go away and keep your opinions to yourself?” That is not normally how I phrase it when I am in a supermarket.

I want to throw something into the mix. As we move forward with so much more work going on across Departments, we might look at having a regional centre of excellence on diagnostics for children on the spectrum, so that we can ensure that wherever we are—whether in the north-east, the south-west, the north-west or Scotland—we know as MPs that we can direct people to a centre of excellence that will be able to help to identify children’s particular needs and so that we never get into the question whether this is about mental health.

Autism is a permanent, different way of being, whether for profoundly autistic children, for whom a great deal of support is required, or those at the high-functioning end of the spectrum—the Asperger’s part—who can be incredibly successful. Some of our greatest inventors and businesspeople are in that space, but if people cannot make it through the basic education system because their needs are not met early on and they fall out of it, that will not happen. Early diagnosis is so important, and I ask the Minister to think about that.

**Danielle Rowley** (Midlothian) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs Trevelyan:** Only if it is a brief intervention, otherwise I will get told off again.

**Danielle Rowley:** That is very generous. Does the hon. Lady agree that early diagnosis has a huge impact on families? I have a constituent who was told that her son had autism at the age of 18 months but did not secure a diagnosis until he was five years old. That had a huge impact.

**Mrs Trevelyan:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Not every council needs a child psychologist who is an expert in the identification of autism, but it would be

[Mrs Trevelyan]

great if there were one or two across the north-east, in my region, whom we knew we could always tap into. There have not been for years. The situation is getting better, but it is not good enough. We need to think more intelligently about how we provide that resource for families.

I want to talk in more detail about interventions. It is so exciting that the teacher training module will come into the system from September. Before I talk about that, I want to read from a letter sent to me by one of my constituents, a lady called Skye. I have not met her; I have knocked on her door, but there has never been anyone in. She wrote to me about her son, who is four years old and has complex needs. He attends our special school in Berwick. She says:

“Every day so many simple things in life that we all take for granted become a moment of stress, worry and concern”.

She says that could give a vast list of examples of the stresses her child undergoes every day. My heart goes out to her; I was there some 15 years ago, too. She highlights one particular issue:

“Shopping trolleys with child seats are designed for toddlers. My little/big man squeezes into this trolley with pain and distress. I have to lift him above my head because I am only a 5ft mummy.”

Those are the sort of practical things that day-to-day life can throw at mums who are having to deal with this. She goes on to say that

“many younger autism sufferers...have no boundaries, no understanding of the consequence of their actions, and if they have a crisis moment could injure themselves”

by falling out of the trolley or running away. I lost James once in a supermarket, and it was possibly the worst half-hour of my life. She says:

“Being confined to a safe space (trolley seat) is safer for them. It provides an object reference”,

as well as security, as a pram does for a much smaller child. That is a really interesting challenge to us, to think about how we might encourage the tools that can help a family in those public spaces where we go every week.

I almost never took James shopping until recently, as part of our plastics challenge, which I am sure the Minister will join us in. We went shopping and I said, “I’m not buying plastics.” He wanted a particular cheese that only came wrapped in plastic, so he had to buy it himself. There is a lesson for an 18-year-old boy who has never been shopping before: he gets taken shopping, and his mother then makes him do his own shopping.

The reality is that the tools to help people get over the crisis points are vital. I really hope that as the autism module rolls out, teachers are given those tools. James had an amazing teacher when he was six years old. He was not diagnosed, but she could see his meltdowns coming. She told me to bring a beanbag into school, which she put behind her desk. She said to James that whenever it all got too much for him—which was quite often, when somebody was prodding him, he was sitting in the wrong place or he could not see or hear—he was allowed to get up and leave his desk or wherever he was and go and sit in the beanbag behind the desk. The teacher knew where he was, because that is where he always went. The other children did not know or care; they carried on with their school activities. It gave him a

safe place that was invisible to everybody else, but they knew he was safe, and then the moment passed.

This is a child who got three A-levels last year and is going to Newcastle to read zoology in September, but when he was seven or eight years old and undiagnosed, nobody thought he would be mainstreamed. He was mainstreamed because teachers thought about how they might give him the tools to get around those moments. We need the teacher training framework to think about the practicalities. These children are simply different, and we have to understand what not being neurotypical means. It is hard for those of us who are neurotypical to understand it.

We must give teachers the opportunity to ask questions. For many teachers in busy classrooms, if one or two children are struggling, the exclusion line is the one that is followed. The behavioural problem kicks in because the child is under a great deal of stress, entirely unnecessarily, and we find those children suffering huge long-term educational failure as a result of the teacher’s inability to intervene early on with something quite simple that can give the child time to recover.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is fantastic news that special educational needs and autism are finally part of initial teacher training. Does she agree that, to make a really big difference, we need to ensure that autism training is a core part of continuing professional development for teachers, so that we can get it into all classrooms?

**Mrs Trevelyan:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. That is exactly the challenge. If we can embed understanding that these children simply see the world and react to it in a different way and that those different ways of looking at a classroom space can be all that is required, we can ensure that we get the very best out of every child.

As I often say, if we look at some of our great inventors, we see that the autistic mind is wired differently and therefore sees the world differently. They are an incredibly valuable part of our society’s intellectual value. Without them, we all think the same way. Group-think and moving in a single direction are not where the great stages of improvements come from. We need minds that look at the world in a completely different way. It does not make any sense to me half the time, but that is fantastic, because it throws in something completely different. They can direct change in a way that very few of us who are neurotypical will ever do, and to lose that by allowing these children to fall out of the education system early on is a great loss to society and to our intellectual value as a nation. I hope very much that the Minister will feed that back.

I reiterate that not being able to access support and a diagnosis is a continuing pressure for families that we should not be allowing to go on. When a doctor says, “I can tell you what it is with your child that you haven’t understood: it’s that they’re on the autistic spectrum,” it is like having a weight lifted off your shoulders. At that point, the world makes sense. As the hon. Member for Huddersfield said, you start to understand and be able to educate yourself as a family and bring others in. You still have to shout at people, because not everybody understands yet, but that is okay. You are empowered as a family member, and as grannies and grandpas, because

you can understand why this child is not quite like others in the family. You can then move forwards and value them, and really give them the tools, so that they can be the great success that we know they can be.

1.29 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), whose speech was interesting, intelligent and very passionate, born of personal experience. I must also congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) on securing and leading this important debate, which follows her great innovation of the Autism Act 2009.

As I am sure other Members did, I watched the excellent Channel 4 TV programme on autism yesterday evening. Its focus was primarily on a number of high-functioning, lively, intelligent and indeed charming younger people, illustrating the enormous breadth of the autistic spectrum. It is clear that the spectrum is not simply linear, but more of a patchwork of very varied and quite different behavioural characteristics. My concern today is about those who suffer more serious symptoms, as well as about their families and carers, who sometimes have to cope with very challenging behaviours, but my main focus will be on the possible causes of autism and how they might be addressed.

We know that autism comes in many forms, and although it is an unusual neurological condition, it can vary enormously—from those with behaviours that can be challenging to high-functioning individuals who sometimes have astonishing talents and abilities. Only yesterday, there were media reports about a brilliant young schoolboy with extraordinary musical abilities who seems destined for a great career as a concert pianist; even now, he is already composing.

As I have said, my particular concern is to look at the possible causes of autism and to address some possible factors in autism in its more distressing forms. I must emphasise that I am no expert in neurology, but I have long taken a thoughtful amateur interest in the subject. I am sure that much, indeed most, autism derives from genetic factors, and as the human genome is explored, some of this will be explained.

Some environmental factors, however, must also play a part in a range of human conditions. For example, it is well known that a deficiency in folic acid during pregnancy can be a contributory factor in certain birth defects, and vitamin D deficiency is at the root of much ill health. Even more worrying are the effects of some prescribed medications given in pregnancy, which have been demonstrated to cause foetal problems and lifetime difficulties for some babies.

I have to say that I have a specific interest in the influence of alcohol consumed in pregnancy, and I have long been an active member of the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Most significantly, questions have been asked about the possibility that alcohol is a factor in some cases of autism. In preparing for this debate, I looked online at what research had been undertaken in order to discover whether there was a causal link between alcohol consumed in pregnancy and some—I emphasise, some—cases of autism. I found abstracts of six research reports dating from 2005 to 2012, in which the researchers have concluded that

FASD and autism do exhibit similarities, although it is difficult to show that they are exactly the same. It is of course important to distinguish correlations and observed similarities from causal relationships.

The finding of one piece of research is that FASD and autism share similarities in social and communicative functioning. A more detailed report has illustrated a strong overlap between behavioural characteristics in FASD and in autism. That piece of research compared behaviours for 10 different conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bipolar disorder and depression, as well as autism and FASD. Some 39 characteristic behaviours for FASD were compared with the other conditions, and of them, 20 were also typical of autism, 24 of bipolar disorder, 17 of depression and 12 of ADHD. There were also differences between FASD and autism disorders, but it remains a possibility that there is a link between the two. Indeed, some individuals have in the past been diagnosed as autistic when they had actually been affected by alcohol and had FASD.

It is known that people with extreme cases of FASD exhibit facial dysmorphology, but researchers have found that FASD children are equally sensitive intellectually, regardless of whether or not they have facial dysmorphology. Such factors can make it more difficult to distinguish FASD from autism, and there are of course cases of individuals having both autism and FASD.

More research clearly needs to be carried out, and I have probably only scratched the surface of the research already done. However, if alcohol is a factor in some cases of autism, this would be very significant, and it would surely make the case for abstaining from alcohol in pregnancy overwhelming. Indeed, any substance, especially a medication, that is known to cause foetal damage should be avoided around the time of conception and during pregnancy. We all know that, but not enough is done to publicise it.

Even if it is eventually found that FASD and autism are entirely separate conditions, reducing the incidence of FASD—a terrible affliction in itself—is surely a vital and urgent matter that must be more seriously addressed by the Government. A number of Governments in Canada, Denmark and elsewhere are far ahead of Britain in taking steps to reduce the incidence of FASD, and we must follow their good practice. Many thousands of people will in future benefit in life-enhancing ways if those of us in politics do much more to reduce levels of the distressing forms of autism and of FASD. If we do this, we shall certainly have achieved something of immense significance, and indeed, I believe that we shall have added to the sum total of human happiness.

1.35 pm

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): I am hugely grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I again congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) on her work in this area. I particularly want to pay tribute to the work of organisations that support autistic people, such as PACT for Autism in my constituency of Harlow. It started off as a small charity, but has now become a national one, and it has done so much to educate me about autism and to support families with autistic children across my constituency and elsewhere.

[Robert Halfon]

Ensuring that all children are able to access supportive, high-quality education and post-16 opportunities is essential for their life chances and for enabling them to climb the education ladder of opportunity. Our Education Committee is currently holding an inquiry into alternative provision, and we are likely to do an inquiry in the future into the role of special needs in education.

Children in alternative provision are the most vulnerable children. Compared to their peers, they are seven times more likely to have a special educational need, 10 times more likely to have a recognised mental health problem and, as I said to my right hon. Friend earlier, four times more likely to be permanently excluded from school than any other child. We have a real problem with the number of exclusions in our country. We are excluding a classroom-plus—35 children—from school every day.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** Is my right hon. Friend aware that schools deliberately exclude children with autism when they know that an Ofsted inspection is coming?

**Robert Halfon:** We have heard all sorts of stories about exclusions in schools, and I think there is a wild west of exclusions out there. This is why our Committee is looking into it and undertaking an inquiry, and we have heard what my hon. Friend has said.

**Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab):** Does the right hon. Gentleman share my frustration at the fact that, while the strategies for making life as easy and pleasant as possible for such children in schools are available to everyone, the dissemination of that knowledge and its take-up by schools and authorities are so lacking?

**Robert Halfon:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I will mention this later, but when my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham opened the debate, she talked about the increased training that is taking place, and the Government are doing a fair bit to try to change this situation.

As I have said, our Committee has heard that the number of exclusions is rising and that increasing numbers of children are being educated in alternative provision, but in some cases this is not the most appropriate place for children to be educated. We have heard that children with special educational needs and disability may have unrecognised or unmet needs early on in their school career—possibly speech, language and communication needs or, indeed, autism.

These children do not engage with their learning, and their struggle to engage and their unmet needs affect their behaviour and they get caught up in the school's disciplinary procedures. Earlier intervention and support may well enable the children to continue to learn with their peers, or to be moved to more specialist provision, without the need for exclusion and the distress and disruption that this creates for the child and their family.

As the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) pointed out, teachers need to be supported and trained to identify where pupils have additional needs and require extra support in the classroom. According to the National Autistic Society, only one in four teachers say that they received any autism training when completing

their teaching qualification. Nearly eight in 10 say that they have received some autism training since qualifying, but fewer than half say they feel confident about supporting a child on the autism spectrum in their class. That is why projects such as The Difference, which aims to train school leaders to support pupils with mental health issues and autism, and reduce exclusion from school, are important. Such leadership is essential.

Our Committee heard from Drew Povey, headteacher of Harrop Fold school. He said that they consider education to be about preparing a pupil for life, and that

“as a result of that, we shifted our mindset to move from ‘we cannot exclude young people’, to, ‘we do not exclude’”.

Indeed, that school excludes no one. Drew Povey went on:

“That was extremely powerful for us as a school, and we are proud to say that we have not excluded a student, fixed term or permanently, now for over 10 years.”

What a remarkable school and remarkable headteacher.

We need to get post-16 opportunities right for young people so that they can continue to climb the ladder of opportunity when they leave school. I served alongside the Minister in one of her previous roles, and she is passionate about apprenticeships. Autistic young people should be able to benefit properly from opportunities such as apprenticeships, and I urge the Government to come up with specific proposals. They are doing a lot for people with disabilities, and to attract more women and people from the black and minority ethnic community, but we need a specific programme to help and encourage businesses to employ apprentices who have autism. I think that a levy would be a good financial incentive, and we should set aside money to create a specific apprenticeship social justice fund to support organisations such as the Prince's Trust that bridge the gap between school and apprenticeships, and help vulnerable people.

These are issues of social justice, and all members of the Education Committee are committed to helping children and young people climb that educational ladder of opportunity. All children should have equal life chances, and be able to learn in schools that meet their needs and support them to thrive. However, being able to climb that ladder of opportunity is not sufficient if young people are not then able to move into the world of work. I welcome the Government's commitment to approving alternative provision for young people, and I am heartened that a review of exclusion is being led by the brilliant former Minister, Ed Timpson. There must be more focus on ensuring that those children do not drop off the cliff edge of support when they leave school.

1.42 pm

**Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab):** It is truly a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), who made an informed and inspiring speech. I also salute the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for her inspiring leadership and for securing this debate.

My constituency team has put making the world an autism-friendly place at the heart of what we do. We have held an autism-specific constituency surgery, and we encourage other MPs to do the same. We have run a roundtable for employers, and I speak to businesses

about what they can do to increase access to jobs for people with autism. We work closely with the National Autistic Society and local organisations such as the Bristol Autism Spectrum Service, SEND a Welcome, and Autism Independence.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): My hon. Friend and neighbour has set a wonderful example in Bristol of how we can work with autism services. I will hold my first autism-friendly surgery next Friday in Bristol with the help of the same organisations she mentioned, and I encourage other MPs to see whether they can do the same.

**Thangam Debbonaire:** I am delighted that my hon. Friend is following the example of Bristol West in Bristol East. I have a member of staff who is allocated to lead for me on autism, and we are pushing the council and cultural institutions to work towards the National Autistic Society autism-friendly award. We support children with autism and their parents to get the educational support they need, and we do that because we believe that people on the autistic spectrum should be able to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic and public lives. We believe that all aspects of our lives are better when autistic people are included, and that is true for neurotypical people, as well as for autistic people and their families.

However, too many autistic people are excluded. Too many—far too many, as the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham knows—feel excluded, unwelcome, or unable to participate in the world around them as it is. They therefore feel isolated and lonely, and that is bad for us all. It is worst, of course, for children and adults with autism who experience that loneliness. New information from the National Autistic Society estimates that autistic people are four times as likely to be lonely as the general public. Four out of five autistic people who responded to the NAS survey said that they felt lonely and socially isolated some of the time. That is shocking and upsetting.

Such isolation is also bad for the parents of children with autism, who told the National Autistic Society that they fear going out because of public ignorance, or they have experienced being judged because of the behaviour of their child—some hon. Members have already mentioned that, in particular the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), who spoke so movingly. Such isolation is also bad for the rest of us, because we lose out on the untapped potential that autistic people have to offer as friends, colleagues, participants in civic society, and leaders. Loneliness hurts. Loneliness hurts health, and it keeps too many autistic people from fulfilling their potential.

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness has done sterling work on this issue, and recently, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) was charged with taking on the Government's loneliness strategy. As they, and the all-party group on loneliness recognise, leaving people to loneliness diminishes all of our humanity. The survey by the National Autistic Society found that 55% of autistic adults want help with social skills, but only 10% actually receive such help; 53% would like employment support, but only 10% receive it; and 70% of autistic adults told the NAS that with more support they would feel less isolated.

Autistic adults experience significant under-employment—only 16% are in full-time work, and a further 16% are in part-time employment. Of the remainder who are not employed, nearly four out of five want to work. Most of us get our daily social interaction from work, and chronic unemployment increases autistic people's loneliness, as well as keeping them on low incomes and making it harder for them to pursue other interests or travel to meet up with friends, thereby becoming less lonely. A lack of understanding by employers, educational institutions and others is often behind such under-employment and unemployment. I do not wish to repeat what other hon. Members have said, but I refer those listening to the debate to those earlier remarks.

I welcome the appointment of a Minister with responsibility for loneliness, who will be committed to developing a strategy, measurements, and funding for activities to prevent loneliness. Given the high risk of loneliness among autistic people and the parents of autistic children, may I ask the Minister to do everything she can to ensure that the loneliness strategy attends specifically to the needs of autistic people? I further ask her to urge all her colleagues to consult people with autism on that strategy.

Will the Minister tell the House what the Government are doing to help public awareness of autism, and to help and assist employers to review, and if necessary change, their recruitment procedures? We should encourage public and private organisations to make their spaces truly autism friendly and, as I have said before in this place, perhaps we should start by doing everything we can to make our buildings here on the estate, and our working practices—that will be a challenge for me—more autism friendly, perhaps by thinking about the noises and interventions that we sometimes make.

**Martin Whitfield:** Does my hon. Friend agree that autistic-friendly solutions in no way exclude non-autistic people?

**Thangam Debbonaire:** Exactly. My hon. Friend virtually predicted what I was about to say because we would all benefit from a more autism-friendly country. I will do my best to finish well under time, and taking interventions may impact on other people's time.

We can all help to reduce loneliness for people with autism and the parents of children with autism. Autistic people and their families experience loneliness as a result of things that we can change. Let us all go from this place today determined to lead that change. We are leaders in our communities, so let us lead the change to make the UK truly autism friendly. Let us start today.

1.49 pm

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and all my other colleagues who have spoken on this matter. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). I am very pleased to support World Autism Awareness Week.

I have a constituency interest and a personal interest in this issue. The constituency has a large number of centres that provide support to those with autism. We also have a spectacular charity, Music for Autism. I was

[John Howell]

interested to hear the comments on the link between music and those with autism, which has been enormously helpful. I hope to come on to my personal interest in due course.

Young people and adults with autism are some of the most loyal and hardworking people I have ever come across. All they need is a chance, and that chance comes through early diagnosis. The more I have looked at this issue, the more I have become attached to the idea of one-stop shops for parents or guardians. Provision varies depending on where one is in the UK. I refer Members to the Department for Education report that covers that, by our former colleague Lee Scott.

On school exclusions, what has shocked me the most is that young people with autism face more exclusions than any other group. That is a frightening thing to take on board. It is perhaps not surprising when we have heard that some schools are excluding people when they know that Ofsted is coming—a disgraceful use of the system.

My personal interest is as an ambassador for a scheme that goes by the names of the Glyn Hopkin Foundation, the Sycamore Trust, and Space—Supporting People with Autism into Continued Employment. The charity does a lot of the work that hon. Members have been talking about the Government providing. It not only provides people who are fully ready for work; it provides advice to employers on how they should go about changing their own operations to make them autism friendly. What I have taken away from its work is a reminder that minor, easy adjustments to recruitment and the workplace can make a huge difference. I am currently trying to take a young person with autism into my office here in the House of Commons to work alongside me, initially for a few weeks on my first attempt. It is a great privilege to be involved in this area.

I will finish a little earlier for similar reasons to those given by the hon. Member for Bristol West, but I will say that the Department for Education has done great work over many years. This is not a question of funding, but attitude. It is a question of getting the attitude right in the Department to face this opportunity to make the most out of those with autism, so that they can better contribute to our society.

Teaching has been mentioned. I am very appreciative of all that has been said about the provision of training for teachers, but actually I would not blame the teachers at all on this issue. I blame a number of local education authorities. It is currently very hit and miss as to whether a local education authority is autism friendly, and can cope and provide all the support services. There are many good examples, but I will not name them now.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Does my hon. Friend agree that not only is it important that schools do not exclude a pupil with autism when the Ofsted inspectors are coming into the school, but that those Ofsted inspectors should be fully trained to understand autism? They could then inspect a real class in a real situation and see how the school handled it.

**John Howell:** My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. I expect Ofsted inspectors to be trained to ask the question, “Who has been excluded who has an

autistic condition?” That should be fundamental to what an Ofsted inspector asks before beginning an examination. My criticism of local education authorities includes the fact that many do not pass on all the funding given to them by central Government. There is a great need for ring-fencing such funds so that LEAs can carry out what we are asking them to do.

1.56 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who made excellent points in his very detailed speech. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for once again prioritising autism in this Chamber. It is extremely important for autism to be raised, not just this week but throughout the year.

There are many faces here that I recognise from previous debates on this subject. There are champions across the House and across parties for autism and autism awareness. I thank hon. Members for their contributions and I look forward to hearing some more. In particular, I thank the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). She is an excellent chair of the all-party group on autism. She has led the way on this issue for many years, from the Autism Act 2009 to the present day. I enjoy working with her very much and hope to continue to do so. Research indicates that there are approximately 100,000 children with autism and 700,000 on the autistic spectrum, including children and adults. That is a large part of our population and it is apt that we discuss their needs and issues, and how to ensure that they achieve their full potential.

I want to touch on access to diagnosis, which other hon. Members have raised, for both adults and children. Unfortunately, this continues to be a postcode lottery across the United Kingdom. It has been raised repeatedly in evidence to the Health Committee and I am aware from my own constituency surgeries that there are still barriers to families, children and adults attaining a diagnosis within an appropriate time span. It has been mentioned that as MPs we are leaders. It is therefore important that, locally, we seek to help constituents to overcome those challenges. I recently wrote to the chief executive of our local NHS trust to find out about waiting times for adults and children. I was pleased with the response, which presented quite an optimistic picture. However, that is not commensurate with people's experience on the frontline so we then have to go back and look at the difference between what services should deliver and are expected to deliver, and what they say they are delivering and can deliver. What additional support can we give to the services? What are the challenges preventing children and families on the frontline from accessing the services in the way that they should and as we expect? Those challenges are still in the system and it is important to overcome them.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady and my colleague on the Health and Social Care Committee, who always brings such expertise and experience to these debates and to the Committee. Does she agree that it is not just the variation around autism, but the scale of that variation that is so striking? Children cannot access any of the other services that might be available without the initial diagnosis.

**Dr Cameron:** That is an apt intervention, and I agree entirely. It is not just the postcode lottery, but the widespread variation right across the United Kingdom. Through the all-party group, we hear that people from different parts of the UK feel that they have to battle the system repeatedly at every stage. This is very important. In Health questions, I have asked the Secretary of State whether the Department might consider putting individuals who can diagnose autism into every child and adolescent mental health services team. I know that the Department is looking at data and waiting times. That is so important to getting some degree of stability in the services provided and to ensure that everyone has adequate access moving forward. Knowing where we are to start with can only be a good thing when we look at the progress being made.

As has been mentioned, autism spectrum disorder affects people across their lifespan, so it has to be at the core of policy across many Departments, including those responsible for education and community. This is also about our surgeries. I have taken on the excellent points made by the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) and I will start my own such surgery in the near future. We have discussed it since our last debate on this subject and it is an excellent idea. I recommend that, as MPs, we all move forward in the same manner, walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

The management of our local shopping centres have been positive about having autism-friendly opening hours so that families can come at particular times. The setting will be made appropriate and people will feel included and relaxed when they go about their daily life. There is so much more to be done. On employment, the autism employment gap is so much higher than the disability employment gap. We must take that forward.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Has the hon. Lady heard about the autism exchange programme, which Ambitious about Autism developed in partnership with the civil service? It has found that employers are pleasantly surprised at the benefits they get from employing people with autism.

**Dr Cameron:** That sounds like an absolutely wonderful initiative, and I hope that it is rolled out to many more organisations. We should all be working with local business communities to champion the potential of people with autism in the workplace. They have great skills to offer and should certainly be given the opportunity to be part of our workforce.

Before I finish, I want to touch on mental health and criminal justice. The last such debate that I took part in in the Chamber was about people who have not only autism, but mental health issues. That is extremely important; it is another reason why they should not be excluded from services—they need quick access as a priority. The Royal College of Psychiatrists estimates that those on the autistic spectrum are seven and a half times more likely to commit suicide. That is an absolutely startling statistic. If we put up barriers before people get to services and support, that figure can only rise. I ask the Minister to address access to services and the understanding of comorbidity within primary care.

On criminal justice, I recently met the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, to discuss this issue, because I feel that those on the autistic spectrum are often lost in

the criminal justice system and are very vulnerable within it. They are subject to bullying and have difficulty adapting and coping in that situation. We must do all that we can, so I was pleased to meet him and discuss some issues and practices from Scotland, and to share best practice right across the United Kingdom on special witness measures, support for those going through a court process and pre-arrest. In my constituency, we have a wonderful police training college at Jackton. I spoke to Police Scotland, which assures me that all its officers have undertaken mental health training and autism awareness training. That is excellent and just what is needed. We must continue to build on that.

I am pleased to speak in this debate, but the more I speak about autism, the more I realise how much more work we have to do. I am pleased to be moving forward on a cross-party basis. I will always be a champion for autism in my constituency and I like to work with like-minded Members across the House, of whom there are many and of whom I am very proud.

2.6 pm

**Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con):** Like many colleagues, I suspect, I started to take a particular interest in how we as a society deal with those who have autism as a result of parents coming to my constituency surgery to describe the challenges that they face, and the obstacles that they must overcome to ensure that their children receive what we all want for our children: a good education, healthcare and so on. What struck me was the strength and determination of those parents. They felt that they had to be strong, determined and sometimes—I am sure that they will not mind me saying this—downright difficult to get the best for their children. We need to ensure that they do not have to be downright difficult to get what their children need, and that we provide for their needs—not necessarily without question, but certainly not in a way that appears obstructive.

Meeting these parents encouraged me to bring forward my ten-minute rule Bill in November 2016. As the motion said, it was a Bill

“to make provision about the access to education, school admissions and support for special educational needs, with particular reference to children diagnosed with autism”.

I noted in my speech that the Equality Act 2010 exists to protect people of all ages from discrimination. It should prevent disabled people from being treated unfairly because of their disability, but in some respects, sadly, there is still a long way to go. I went on to note what an irony it was that the Equality Act was being used to discriminate against children with autism. The National Autistic Society told me at the time that it believed that too many schools did not fully understand their duties towards children and young people with the condition. The law requires them to make reasonable adjustments for disabled and special educational needs pupils so that they may achieve their full potential. “Reasonable adjustments” mean ensuring that a disabled child or one with special needs can do what their non-disabled peers do, and it is important to recognise that while children with autism may behave in a manner that looks like bad behaviour, it is often an expression of anxiety. Unfortunately, as has been said, not all teachers have received specialist training that would enable them to identify it as such.

[*Martin Vickers*]

I had made a note that Department for Education figures show that autistic children are three times more likely to be excluded than children who do not have special educational needs, but the Chair of the Education Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), said earlier that they were four times more likely to be excluded. I suspect he is even better informed than the report from which I obtained my figure.

After presenting my Bill, I had a meeting with the then Minister, Edward Timpson, who launched a consultation on whether changes to the guidelines were needed. It would be nice to think that whatever changes resulted have cured the problem, and things might have improved, but cases in my Cleethorpes constituency indicate that it is not clear that that has indeed happened.

In that speech that I made 16 months ago, I said:

“There appears to be a loophole in the law that does not consider challenging behaviour linked to a child’s disability as an impairment. If their disability could result in aggressive behaviour towards others in the school, the law on disability discrimination does not help them, and some governing bodies use ‘tendency to physical abuse of others’ as a reason not to meet the needs of an autistic child”.—[*Official Report*, 1 November 2016; Vol. 616, c. 810.]

Sadly, it is then much easier to exclude such children. Of course governors have a duty to others in the school, but exclusion is sometimes the easy option.

This week I received letter from a constituent, who wrote:

“my daughter has been banned from the end of school Prom because she has ‘physically assaulted teachers and students’, no offer of being chaperoned was offered. I feel that the school has let her down by restricting her studies and as a result she is only taking four GCSE’s whereas prior to the school’s action she could have potentially got 5 pass grades.”

As I said, I received that letter only this week, so I have not yet had an opportunity to take the matter up with the school, but the fact that a parent felt it necessary to contact their MP about it rather than discussing it as part of the normal processes does not bode well.

A recent article in my local newspaper, the *Grimsbey Telegraph*, set out the problems faced by parents of autistic children. It reported:

“Parents have...hit out at what they perceive as local services blaming them for the condition of their children, often being told that they are just poorly behaved, with the parents being told that they would have to go on a parenting course before they could get an autism assessment”.

That is unacceptable. The report continued:

“The main criticism has been levied against CAMHS, the national service commissioned by North East Lincolnshire Council that is meant to provide an autism pathway to help support children...Parents feel that while this service is meant to be available, they have had numerous troubles in trying to access it...Cora Leeson”—

a constituent of mine—

“has been campaigning for better autism services in the area for a number of years, and believes that a recent freedom of information request she has received a response to shows that there has been a very low number of people in the area actually receiving a diagnosis of being on the autism spectrum.

Her figures showed that from September 1, 2016, to May 31, 2017, there were 36 assessments...carried out by CAMHS...Only seven of these resulted in a diagnosis of autism.”

My aim is not to be critical of North East Lincolnshire Council or the local clinical commissioning group. Improvements have been made, many people are working hard to deliver a better service, and I recognise that there are resource implications. Moreover, society has moved a long way in improving the lives of those with disabilities or special needs. Nevertheless, in my constituency and elsewhere, there is clearly more to be done. A system that is designed—as it has to be—to provide for a vast range of people and needs must have enough flexibility to enable the needs of all to be dealt with. I welcome the opportunity to highlight once again the needs of those with autism.

2.13 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this important debate. I thank the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for securing it, and for all her work in Parliament over many years on behalf of autistic people.

My engagement with autism comes through the many constituents who have contacted me since my election in 2015, through the experiences of friends with autistic children, and through the especially harrowing case of my constituent Matthew Garnett. I first met Matthew’s mother Isabelle in February 2016, when she came to my surgery. Isabelle told me that that Matthew, who was then 15, had been sectioned after a crisis in which he had attacked his father at home. He had been admitted to a psychiatric intensive care unit at Cygnet hospital in Woking, a private unit designed for assessment, diagnosis and onward transfer in which patients should stay for no longer than six weeks, but where Matthew had been for several months. The unit had no specialism in autism, and it has subsequently been closed after the Care Quality Commission found serious failings.

Matthew’s family, in their desperation to see him moved from Woking, had identified St Andrew’s hospital in Northampton as a specialist unit that appeared to have the expertise to meet his needs. I helped them to secure a place there. Soon after Matthew’s move to St Andrew’s, his parents began to express serious concerns about the treatment that he was receiving. There was little evidence that he was participating in any therapeutic or educational activities, he seemed distressed and withdrawn and, most worryingly, he had started to lose weight extremely quickly. When I visited him in St Andrew’s with his family, I was shocked at both the condition he was in, and the attitude and behaviour of some of the senior clinical staff whom I met. The subsequent complaints that his parents and I made, combined with a “Dispatches” documentary on his case and those of others at St Andrew’s, led to investigations, including one by the General Medical Council. I understand that some changes have now been implemented there.

Matthew’s family again identified an alternative provision for their son: Alderwood, also based in Northampton. This time, things worked out well. Matthew is living in supported housing with other young people. He is well and thriving, taking minimal medication, volunteering at the local football club, and participating in his local community. This could not be more different from the time that he spent in hospital, held under section.

I raise Matthew's case again today because there is still unfinished business arising from it, and because although, thankfully, Matthew is now well and thriving, the experiences that he and his family have had resonate in many different ways with the experiences of autistic people up and down the country, including many of my other constituents.

For too many families, there is a constant struggle to access support. The then Minister responsible for mental health, the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), commissioned a review of Matthew's case from Dr Michael Marsh, and the report was published in June 2016. It catalogues a constant struggle on the part of Matthew's family with every public service with which they had interacted since he was two years old to secure the support that he needed.

As other Members have said, there is a lack of expertise and understanding of autism across health and education services. I have heard from many parents that the experience of their autistic children in education is only as good as the expertise that any given teacher has in any given year. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) spoke of her son's experience of one particular teacher. The support given to autistic children in school should not depend on accident—on the experience of a given teacher.

In particular, there is a lack of understanding of the relationship between anxiety and behaviour in autistic children. Disciplinary measures do not work if a child's behaviour results from that child's being scared or anxious. Such measures will only traumatise children further in those circumstances. I echo what others have said today: not only do we need training for new teachers coming through the system, but we urgently need additional training for existing teachers. They need to learn what autism is and how best to support autistic children in their classrooms.

There is a lack of funding for assessment, diagnosis and SEND support. Too many families are waiting too long for assessment and diagnosis. I have heard many head teachers say that even when families have a diagnosis, it is often still insufficient to draw down the additional support that is needed because of constraints on resources. This is a false economy for families. If we fail children in the education system by failing to give them the support that they need, we condemn them to a life of struggle, often to mental ill health, and often to interactions with the criminal justice system. Moreover, that will certainly lead to much more public sector expenditure in a negative rather than a positive way.

Too many avoidable crises are experienced by people with autism, and that brings me to the importance of community provision. I recently visited a centre called Lifelong Family Links. It is in a neighbouring constituency, but supports many of my constituents with autism. It is a day school and after-school club for young people with autism. It runs on a shoestring, and is now at risk of closure because of funding cuts. The families there to whom I spoke told me that many of their children would be in the criminal justice system—and, in one case, a foster placement would have broken down—without the support provided by Lifelong Family Links.

Again, it is a false economy when in the current atmosphere of austerity we are unable to provide the tiny amounts for what community-based services provide—they deliver so much. There is too much hospitalisation

of young people with autism, and that is often in the private sector, with very little scrutiny of the effectiveness of the care and treatment that is provided. Matthew's private hospital bed cost £12,000 a week of NHS money for care that was making his health worse, and I support Matthew's parents' campaign for homes not hospitals for autistic young people.

I wrote to the Minister responsible for mental health and inequalities when she was new in post, and then again in November 2017 to request a meeting to review Matthew's case and the lessons that can be learned from it, but a meeting has not been forthcoming. I therefore want to end by asking the Minister for Care, who is on the Front Bench today, if she will agree to meet me and Matthew's family so that we can ensure that the suffering that he experienced was not in vain, and we can deliver the change we need for families with autistic children across the country.

2.20 pm

**Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con):** As everyone here today knows, autism takes many forms and it is sometimes not physically obvious. That is probably why some people are not diagnosed when they are children. However, most are, so I want to talk about one of them.

In the early 1970s, my parents ran a home for children with special needs at Chinley in the Peak district. My superb younger sister Alison Stewart, now Mrs Alison Collier, had just finished school and was living with my mother and father before starting further education. I remember that one of the young boys in the care of my parents was called Frankie. He was autistic. Of course, Alison also helped to look after the children when she could.

Frankie seemed to adore and trust my sister, and Alison, for her part, liked and helped the boy a lot. The problem came when my sister went off to college in Leeds. Alison knew that it would be very upsetting for Frankie, so to help to calm him my mother took him along when she drove Alison to start her university course. Together the three of them went to Alison's allocated room in the college. They started unpacking her luggage. As they did so, Frankie kept returning Alison's belongings to her suitcases. He was clearly not accepting the situation and simply did not want things to change. I gather that that is typical behaviour for some people with autism and, of course, Alison had to stay in Leeds.

When my mother returned to Chinley, it was clear that Frankie was very upset. Apparently, he sat in Alison's room, rocking backwards and forwards in agitation. He was clearly very sad. For her part, Alison knew very well how upset Frankie would be by her departure. She telephoned home and spoke to my parents. Then one of my parents handed the receiver to Frankie, and, for the first time ever, he used the phone. He was desperate to communicate with Alison, and, by a supreme effort, he spoke to her. It was an achievement that my parents always remembered with pride until they died.

For Alison, her experience of caring for and helping Frankie was crucial in deciding her future career. After university, she trained to teach people with additional needs, and until this day she still does just that.

I gather that autistic people do not normally have learning difficulties. Indeed, they are often very intelligent. They can also have skills that are unique. That is certainly

[Bob Stewart]

the case with the artist Stephen Wiltshire, who suffers from autism. His particular talent is drawing lifelike, accurate representations of cities, sometimes having only seen them briefly. They are amazing pictures, and I suspect that most honourable colleagues have seen them. Stephen studied fine art at the City & Guilds college and was awarded the MBE for services to the art world in 2006. His work is popular all over the world, and he clearly is, or should be, a poster boy for autism.

Autism impacts on people in many ways, yet it has nothing to do with ability to learn and it is certainly not visible. As we have heard today, it is an all-life disorder and there is no cure for it. If there is a common condition among the varieties of autism, it is probably that people have difficulty with social interaction. Often, they do not like change in their lives or routine, like Frankie when my sister Alison left home to go to university. They also feel, and sometimes look, isolated and withdrawn.

As my good friend, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan)—who is in the Chamber rather than drinking piña coladas in Amersham, as was suggested earlier—has said, autism hits about one in a hundred people, so it is pretty common. Thank goodness that it is also a condition that is increasingly being understood, and I hope very much that a debate such as ours today will increase people's understanding and support for those with autism even more. I will finish there, Madam Deputy Speaker, so that others can speak for longer.

2.25 pm

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Somebody on Twitter recently asked which film made in Hollywood best bears watching over and again. Of course, I answered "Groundhog Day". Sometimes, when we have such debates, it can feel a bit like groundhog day, because the same sorts of issues are repeated over and again. What is really important is that they generate some raising of awareness, which they do, and action from the Government.

I hope that having listened to today's debate the Minister will take away some of the issues that have been raised and try to turn them into some sort of Government action. Hon. Members have been right to raise a number of issues, including that of exclusions, which was mentioned by the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers). What is disappointing is that if we look at the statistics, we can see that exclusions were dropping in the noughties. As an ex-Minister, I can tell hon. Members why they were dropping: they were given serious attention at the centre of government and there was a real grip on bringing down the rate of exclusions, both permanent and temporary, for all children, including children with autism.

One problem—although I understand why the Government did this—of atomising our schools system by making them more and more independent and bringing in accountability measures that encourage sometimes perverse and unethical actions from headteachers is that, in my view, it leads to a rise in exclusions. It is generally thought better to get someone out of the way when the Ofsted inspection comes along, as the

hon. Member for Henley said, or to have them excluded from the school if they would bring down the GCSE results. That is unethical, especially without a system in place for those children to be properly educated elsewhere. I appeal to Ministers to look very carefully at what is happening to those exclusion statistics and to get a grip of them from the centre.

It is understandable that the focus of most of the debates on autism tends to be about how it impacts on children. That is completely understandable, but we must not forget, and many hon. Members have not forgotten, that autism does not cease to be an issue when someone turns 18 and becomes an adult. Many of the services that might be available to children with autism fall away when they become adults. Parents get older and it is often more difficult for them to cope. Adults with autism face a complex world when they leave full-time education, if, as we hope, they have not been excluded from it, and the behaviours and traits associated with autism are often poorly understood, misinterpreted and sometimes even mistaken, as we have heard, for criminality.

A key problem is the difficulty in ensuring that services are joined up across the Government—across the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice, the Attorney General's Office, the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Education. We had a debate on this very subject on 30 January in Westminster Hall, and it was suggested by a Government Member—I thought it was a very good suggestion—that the Government, with Cabinet Office oversight, should create something like the armed forces covenant and veterans board to ensure that every Department has someone focused on autism and its impact on families. In my experience, as a former Minister, to get Departments working together and to make progress, we need to get Ministers involved. Ministers have to be brought together, not just officials. It is possible to make significant change by ensuring ministerial leadership and bringing Ministers together across the Government.

The Minister will be about the third Minister to respond to a debate on autism that I have participated in recently, and I hope that she will go away and talk to other Ministers to ensure that they are thinking about how they can work to bring Government policy together on tackling the issues around autism. I hope that she will take seriously the suggestion from a Conservative Member in a recent debate that they should bring together a board or working group of Ministers from different Departments across the Government to tackle some of these issues with ministerial leadership.

When I spoke in that Westminster Hall debate at the end of January, I focused on how adults with autism were affected by the criminal justice system. That has also been mentioned by the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on autism, the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), and I very much welcome her call for evidence to the group. I encourage other hon. Members to respond. I will certainly do so, and I will encourage my constituents to participate as well.

Some of the behaviours associated with autism, such as stimming—the repetitive physical movement that helps to reinstate a sense of calm in people with autism—are often misunderstood. This is particularly the case for a

constituent of mine when he is in a crowded public space or travelling on public transport. When adults on the autistic spectrum come under suspicion of criminal behaviour, safeguarding becomes absolutely crucial, and I referred to that constituent's case in the Westminster Hall debate. The safeguards in the criminal justice system did not protect him as they should have done under current policy and practice. His stimming was misinterpreted while travelling in crowded conditions on public transport, and that led to his arrest.

I appeal to the Government to look specifically at what happens to adults with autism when they come into contact with the criminal justice system and to find ways to ensure that the police—particularly the British Transport police—are properly trained and that all the services know how to deal with autistic people when they are arrested. I hope that Ministers will consider setting up that joint group. I do not expect her to commit to that today, but I hope that she will commit to taking the idea away and considering it further with other Ministers and reporting back to the House at an appropriate time, so that our debates do not just become groundhog day.

2.32 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan). I want first to place on record the fact that many of my constituents have contacted my office and urged me to attend this debate. Many of them have sent emails expressing how much it would mean to them if their Member of Parliament were to attend the debate. I am glad to see so many other hon. Members here as well.

When I was first elected, one of the first things I introduced in my constituency was a surgery specifically for carers. That is important for carers of people with autism, because they often face issues in isolation, including education, social and social security issues. Sometimes, those issues are not faced in isolation; they can become combined. That is why I introduced a specific surgery for carers, so that we could look at all those issues in combination, rather than dealing with them separately.

I want to raise a matter that has not yet been mentioned—namely, the difficulties that those with autism and their carers have when navigating their way through the social security system, particularly the personal independence payment application process. I have a constituent, Mrs Geraldine Lynch, who attended a PIP assessment with her son Jordan, who has autism. Mrs Lynch has said that the descriptions of her son in the reports that came back from the assessment process and the mandatory reconsideration process were unrecognisable. Perhaps they were the wrong files, describing the wrong individual, or perhaps my constituent was misdiagnosed and not given a proper PIP assessment.

My real fear about the PIP process is that far too often there is a lack of specialism among the assessors and a lack of understanding of specific conditions. My experience of my constituency workload tells me that that also affects those who suffer from autism. I encourage the Government to look specifically at ensuring that assessors of PIP, employment and support allowance and other benefits include a specialist on autism and related conditions. That is very important if we are to help those people.

There have been some positive developments in my constituency. One of them relates to my constituents Debbie Elliott and Claire Ellis, who have launched a support group called the Triple A Parents and Carers Support Group in Govan, and I would like to thank the Govan Housing Association for providing free space in its hub to allow the group to organise. It runs a drop-in every Friday. The purpose of the group is to allow parents and carers facing the same issues to share their experiences and to give each other advice, information and support. It is important that carers of those with autism and other related conditions have that kind of support, and the number of support groups is growing in my constituency and elsewhere. They allow support and the sharing of information and experiences, which helps other individuals. Added to that, on the Pollok side of my constituency, Differabled Scotland is organising a parent-to-parent peer support group for parents and carers of children, young people and adults.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): My hon. Friend has mentioned Differabled Scotland. Some of the people who run that organisation are constituents of mine, and I had a powerful meeting with them during the general election campaign last year. It is clear that the amount of support needed for people with autism is growing, and the work of Differabled Scotland is particularly valuable because it provides a peer support network of parents and carers of children of all ages. It does very valuable work.

**Chris Stephens:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I, too, met organisers from Differabled Scotland a couple of weeks ago, and it was an excellent meeting. It is quite inspiring that there is peer-to-peer support and that people are sharing their experiences. Both the organisations that have been launched in my constituency are important.

It is also important for people to have access to welfare rights officers, and those officers are in attendance when these groups meet to help people to navigate their way through the various issues that I have mentioned, particularly those relating to social security support. Those groups that are now getting up and running also need funding, and I would like to ask the Minister what kind of funding the Government are planning to put in place to help those peer support groups to grow. What kind of finance will be available to them? I pledge to help them to get the necessary finances, so that they can continue to support carers and parents and help their organisations to grow.

2.38 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): It is an honour to speak in this important debate. My constituent, 14-year-old Zachary Saunders-Love, has a severe intellectual disability, autistic spectrum disorder and sensory and communication issues. Zachary is a wonderful young boy, physically strong but often unco-ordinated and unco-operative. The week before Christmas, he made a clumsy grab at one of his teaching assistants at his special school, and accidentally fractured her collarbone. It was an awful thing to happen, for Zachary, his family and the teaching staff. As a result, Zachary was permanently excluded from his special school. Since then, he has been stuck at home, being cared for by his father, Mark, who is losing

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

hope of finding a suitable alternative facility nearby able to handle children of his size and with his complex needs. Mark told me:

“My son and many like him have a life limiting condition that will last for their entire time on Earth. Many won’t improve. None of them will get better. They will never be numerate or literate and they will never give back to society in real terms. Because of this they are not welcome in schools who are ultimately in competition with each other for results, and resources.”

A recent Ofsted report showed that Bedford Borough Council had significant challenges with special educational needs and disability provision. I know that it is working hard to make the necessary improvements, and I will be meeting with local authority leaders as soon as possible to discuss this important issue. I was pleased to hear the Secretary of State addressing the all-party group on autism recently about the need for a review of the shockingly high exclusion rates among SEND children. Will the Minister update us on when this review will take place, and will she agree to meet with Mark Love, who only wants to give his son the education he deserves and has some fantastic ideas for easing the burden on the SEND service?

2.41 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Like all the speakers who have gone before me, I am delighted to speak in this important debate on autism, particularly as it takes place during World Autism Awareness Week. In common with colleagues across the House, I also want to put on the record my thanks to the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan), who has blazed a trail in this area.

Today’s debate is important because for far too many people living with autism there is not just the actual condition to cope with, but, as we have heard, the isolation and often bullying and judgmental attitudes from a society or community that too often does not comprehend the condition. That is why we all need to work hard to raise awareness of it. In the longer term, the challenges that the condition brings can leave those living with it emotionally scarred, which in turn can lead to difficulties accessing employment and living a fulfilling life.

We know that 700,000 people in the UK are autistic, but many others we do not know about will be awaiting a diagnosis. Even if we take the 700,000 figure, however, and then factor in the relatives, it means that living with autism is a fact of life every single day for 2.8 million people. It is right and proper, therefore, particularly during World Autism Awareness Week, that we debate this important matter and recognise the challenges of the condition and how much more we must do as a society to meet them. Attitudes towards and awareness of autism are changing, but we still have some way to go.

We also need to understand, as the right hon. Lady pointed out, that autism is not a mental health condition. That said, as many as 71% of children with autism also live with a mental health challenge, such as anxiety, depression or obsessive compulsive disorder. Such mental health challenges are not inevitable, however, but the result, it seems, of the social isolation that autism too

often brings. The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services found that 26% of graduates on the autism spectrum were unemployed—by far the highest rate of any disability group and more than double the average unemployment rate for disabled adults—and, although figures are hard to establish, it is thought that only 15% of autistic adults in the UK are in full-time work.

A large scale study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* in November 2015 found that people with autism were more than twice as likely as their peers in the wider population to die prematurely, and recent work by the National Autistic Society found that only 16% of those living with autism and their families felt that the general public had a meaningful understanding of autism. Moreover, young people with autism are 28 times more likely than their peers who do not live with autism to have suicidal thoughts. That is the scale of the challenge; we have a significant way to go, despite having made some progress.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I do not know if, in common with me, the hon. Lady received a briefing from the Royal College of Psychiatrists for this debate, but I was surprised to find that one in 10 psychiatry consultant posts were unfilled. We have a shortage of psychiatrists, which inhibits progress in this area, particularly in diagnosis and treatment.

**Patricia Gibson:** As the right hon. Lady’s intervention shows, meeting the challenge will not be easy. We still have huge mountains to climb to make life better for people living with this condition.

All these challenges show why we must continue to highlight the condition. It is important not just that people living with this condition can access the support they need but that they feel supported and that they live in a society that does not overlook, shun or ignore them, as has happened too often in the past. The challenges facing those living with autism are not inevitable. With work and education, and by raising awareness and understanding of autism in our communities, much can be done to counteract the negative outcomes they too often face. That is why I want to put on the record the sterling work done in my constituency by community campaigners Suzanne Fernando and her family, Jordan, Arron and Kester. The Fernando family live with autism every day and have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the condition in their local community of Ardrossan and beyond, and have met with considerable success in doing so. Every year, they put in a huge amount of work to hold a coffee morning to disseminate information on the issue and offer support to those in the community living with the challenges of autism every day. As I have said, we know how isolating this condition can be.

**Mr Sheerman:** We are very impressed by the work that the hon. Lady’s group is doing, but I am slightly nervous about one thing that I am picking up in her speech. A lot of people I meet in the autism community do not like the word “condition”, because it presupposes that it is an illness, which it is not.

**Patricia Gibson:** The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I shall try to refrain from using that word in the future, as I am sure we all will.

If we raise awareness and understanding of autism, the wider public will necessarily display more sensitivity, kindness and compassion towards those living with this condition, and it is this that will help to remove the shadow of loneliness and isolation that autism too often brings. We know that loneliness and isolation are very damaging to general health and wellbeing—their corrosive effects are as damaging as smoking cigarettes—so we could actually be saving lives.

It is not all bad news, however—progress has been made. I am proud that the Scottish Government in 2011 launched the Scottish strategy for autism, declaring that autism was a national priority. But the job is not done—not by a long way. We know that there is no room for complacency, and we can all play our part in developing our awareness and displaying understanding of the challenges and difficulties that those living with autism face every day. I hope that this debate and World Autism Awareness Week have played some small part in that, and that they demonstrate how seriously the House takes the issue.

2.48 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) on bringing this debate to the Floor of the House, and I thank all the right hon. and hon. Members who have made significant and wonderful contributions, including personal points of view, to this debate. World Autism Awareness Day is designed to highlight autism and, more importantly, the struggles that those who have autism go through and how we as a society can help them. We certainly are making strides towards that. The Minister will be able to highlight some of the things that we have done and, to be fair, some of the things that we still need to do.

Some local churches in my community allow local autism groups to use their facilities as a safe space to meet and have fun with the children in a controlled atmosphere. The Moviehouse chain of cinemas in Northern Ireland screens autism-friendly screenings on the first Friday of every month, making certain changes to make the experience more enjoyable for the child and their families, including having the sound and lights on low and no trailers, giving people the freedom to move around and take their own food and drink, and offering free entry for carers with a valid CEA card. Odeon cinemas also offer certain autism-friendly screenings.

I want to say a public thanks to those chains and to my own local cinema, Movieland Newtownards—now part of IMC chain since the sad passing of Ernie Watson—which has plans to begin autism-friendly screenings in my constituency. I suggest that other hon. Members have a chat with their local cinemas to see whether they will do the same. Such screenings may not make the most money—that is not what they are about—because people are allowed to bring in their own snacks for their children to eat and because there are no adverts, but they provide a service that is appreciated by families throughout the community. The life of an autistic child can be somewhat isolated, and the nature of the complex needs of the child can also mean an isolated family life for those who live with the experience every day.

Research cited by the Royal College of Psychiatrists that has been mentioned by others highlights the high levels of suicide among autistic people. Roughly 40% of

autistic young people have symptoms of at least one anxiety disorder, compared with 15% in the general population. The hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), who has just left the Chamber, referred to the welfare changes, and I want to put on the record my concerns about them. Autistic children and adults are affected by changes to ESA, work capability assessments and PIP. Assessors need to be aware of what it is to have autism. With respect, if they had that ability, it would make things a lot easier.

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Constituents have told me that they are absolutely terrified by the assessment process, so does the hon. Gentleman agree that there needs to be a far more sensitive and direct approach to dealing with people with autism?

**Jim Shannon:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and he and I regularly share comparisons between our constituencies. Assessors need to be sensitive, reactive and understanding.

Autism is a massive issue for schools to deal with, and only a seasoned teacher may be able to spot the signs of autism in a child. The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) referred to a child who was able to go and sit on a cushion behind a desk, and that shows an understanding teacher who knows how to deal with such issues. We cannot reach out and cure the situation as such, but it is important that we build in the support systems. While there has been significant improvement in the number of diagnostic assessments, and many hon. Members have referred to early diagnosis—the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to her own circumstances in a personal and honest way, and it is important that we listened to that—coverage is still very patchy. Will the Minister outline how the Government are ensuring equity of access across the country? Have discussions been held with the Northern Ireland Department of Health to ensure parity of accessibility?

Northern Ireland has a slightly different system in that we have the Autism Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, and the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) referred to the Scottish legislation, which also came into force in 2011. The regions across the United Kingdom have some really good stuff in place and have done significant work, and I suggest that we should be exchanging that good practice. If we do that, I think we will all gain. Northern Ireland has gained from what has been done in Scotland, and Scotland and Northern Ireland can gain from what you do in England. I again suggest very gently that you could really gain from what has been done—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, not you; I meant the Minister. Someday I will learn not to use that word—you live in hope.

In Northern Ireland, one in 40 or 2.5% of children have a diagnosis of autism. Accurate prevalence figures for adults can be difficult because many adults with autism do not have a formal diagnosis so the statistics are misleading, but 25% of individuals with autism have an accompanying learning disability. It is not just the autism but the spin-offs such as anxiety disorders and learning disabilities. Their education may be a wee step behind, but we have heard good things today about the results for children when effort and time are put in.

[Jim Shannon]

The fact that four males are diagnosed with autism for every one female is perhaps an indication that we might need to address the gender issue. However, we know that it is sometimes harder to diagnose females with autism, so the statistics may hide the true number of autistic females.

Statistics show that 16% of autistic adults are in full-time employment, despite individuals with autism having ability. Again, it is important to put the issue of employment on the record. Many autistic people, especially those diagnosed in adulthood, have little or no access to post-diagnosis support, as the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) also mentioned. Young adults with autism should not be forgotten, so what are we doing nationwide?

Diagnoses of autism are as different as snowflakes, which means that a one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work. We have to look at it individually and not collectively, because that is not how it is done. We must diagnose the level of each individual and provide appropriate support not simply to them but to their family. It must also be highlighted that, although one in four people with autism has a learning disability, three in four do not. Whether or not there is a learning disability, we must do more to support all of them to reach their full potential rather than be held back by a lack of understanding from society in general.

Our job in this House, through the Minister, whom we are pleased to see and to support, is to ensure that adequate support services are in place and to raise awareness to foster greater understanding among the general public.

2.56 pm

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate on a condition that affects more than 700,000 people in the UK but that is often misunderstood.

I welcome World Autism Awareness Week and the opportunity to have this debate in the Chamber. I thank all the contributors, and I will acknowledge each in turn, but I particularly thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who rightly outlined that some of the welfare changes have had a detrimental impact on those with autism. The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) highlighted that this Parliament could benefit from being autism friendly, which would be a benefit to all.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for their initiatives in their local communities and for their carer-friendly and autism-friendly surgeries. I hope to be able to follow in their footsteps.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** The hon. Lady will be pleased to know that Parliament has been accredited as an autism-friendly destination, of which we are very proud. We want to try to maintain that across the board, so we are constantly keeping the administrative authorities up to their mettle so we retain that accreditation.

**Angela Crawley:** I was just about to champion the right hon. Lady and celebrate her championing of those with autism and her work with the APPG. Lastly, the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), in one of today's most valuable contributions, spoke of her son's experience.

As we have heard, the National Autistic Society estimates that 16% of working-age people with autism are in full-time employment and only 32% are in any kind of paid work. Furthermore, 79% of people with autism are currently on benefits. One thing we could do in World Autism Awareness Week is consider how policies affect individuals with autism.

My constituent Macoist Fordyce, about whom I have spoken previously, has Asperger's syndrome and recently applied for universal credit with the help of his mother, who felt compelled to highlight the treatment they both faced at their local jobcentre. I am not saying this to be political, as I simply want to inform the Government and give them an opportunity to address it, because that is exactly what this debate should do. Although my constituent had received an email at the time asking whether he had any physical disabilities, no consideration was given to what someone with autism may face. They were greeted by two advisers on arrival, who were behind a glass panel, knew nothing of Macoist's autism and stated that he would meet a work coach on his next appointment. Mrs Fordyce tells me that she explained in detail how Asperger's syndrome affected her son, including the difficulties involved in attending that initial appointment, but was informed that he would have to attend or his claim would not be processed.

Let us take a moment to think about how different and less stressful this situation could have been if the jobcentre staff had some training in autism awareness. Let us imagine the original appointment email had not just asked about physical disabilities but had asked whether there were any barriers that would prevent Macoist from attending. Let us imagine that on receiving the information that Macoist has Asperger's syndrome, the jobcentre had sent through full details of what to expect at the appointment, including that a quiet room would be made available to try alleviate some of the anxieties he experienced. Let us imagine that the frontline advisers had read his application, in order to be aware of his disability, and then knew how to put in place the appropriate strategies to conduct the interview accordingly as they understood what my constituent might have had difficulty with, given that he had outlined that he had autism and that a neurodiversity toolkit is in place. I am sure Members will agree that Macoist and his mother could have had a more positive experience.

The "About Me" disability passport is an excellent idea that could certainly ease some of the issues faced by those with an autistic spectrum disorder. However, I question whether the Minister's good intention in bringing forward this passport with access hosted on the websites of charities and other third sector organisations has actually come to fruition over the past year. I recognise that work is being done, but we can promote that work further and this is a prime opportunity to review those processes and make sure that we are doing this—certainly my constituent had never heard of it or come across it.

Mrs Fordyce reports that her son's second appointment with the work coach was even more challenging. Again, no attempts were made to accommodate Macoist's

disabilities, resulting in a panic that might have been avoided if his first experience had been taken on board and referred to for the second meeting. The work coach was also unaware of Macoist's autism, and was unaware that Mrs Fordyce was his appointee and refused to let her assist her son with his answers. No allowances were made for the challenges Macoist would face in completing his work commitment or holding down a position of employment, and they were told that he had to seek and be available for work or his claim would not be processed.

Sadly, the difficulties faced by my constituent in the welfare system are not confined to the jobcentre. On the work capability assessment, despite a phone call to check that Macoist would be seen at his 3 pm appointment and again checking on arrival at reception, at 4.20 pm Mrs Fordyce was called back to reception to be told that, after they had looked at Macoist's assessment form, they had found there was no one with a specialised report of his assessment that would be able to do the assessment and that it would probably have to take place in a few weeks' time.

In the course of my casework, I have submitted many complaints to both Independent Assessment Services and the Centre for Health and Disability Assessments. I have been told on many occasions that health professionals have to be trained and accredited experts approved by the Secretary of State, and it is not a requirement for them to be a specialist in any particular field. Perhaps simply expanding autism awareness training to those who work on a day-to-day basis in this area would be a starting point. This particular complaint has not yet been resolved, but it again highlights how the problems faced by those with autism in the social security system could easily be tackled by simply expanding on some of the brilliant initiatives and programmes that already exist.

Of course, in the Scottish Government's work and in Northern Ireland there are many prime examples of areas where both the devolved nations and Administrations are doing things differently, and we can all learn from this across the board. On that basis, I ask the Minister simply to consider the work being done by the Scottish Government, and I recognise the work of the UK Government in this area. Many aims, strategies and initiatives to improve the lives of those with autistic spectrum disorder are already in place, but a key point to remember from this debate is that there is of course more that we can do. For an individual with autism, there is no benefit to the current system. I encourage the Minister to revisit the aims of the hidden impairments toolkit, the autism and neurodiversity toolkit and the "About Me" passport, and ensure that the targets are being met.

3.4 pm

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) on securing this debate and thank the Backbench Business Committee for providing the time for it. It is an important debate because, as we have heard, there are several hundred thousand people with autism, and of course millions of people will be in a family with one of those autistic people. It is important to thank Autistica, the National Autistic Society, Ambitious about Autism and all the other charities and organisations in the sector for the work that they do and the support

that they give to those with autism. I also wish to recognise the Whole Autism Family in my constituency, which is run by Anne-Marie and Martin Kilgallon. They have two sons with autism and provide amazing support to other families in the area.

It is important to say that, although I am the shadow Mental Health Minister, as we have heard this afternoon autism is not a mental health condition. It is entirely possible for people with autism to have good mental health, but, sadly, for too many that is not always the case. As we heard from the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), it is estimated that between 70% and 80% of autistic people develop mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, and four out of 10 children with autism have at least two mental health challenges. Indeed, Autistica highlighted mental health as the top concern facing people with autism and their families.

It is clear that more needs to be done to support the mental health needs of people living with autism. The reduction of the health inequalities experienced by people living with autism is a priority for the NHS mandate for 2017-18. That is of course welcome, but to tackle the disparities it is necessary to ensure access to appropriate mental health care.

The motion rightly highlights diagnosis—the vital first step towards getting support for people with autism. As we heard in the excellent contributions from the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami), getting a diagnosis is the first hurdle that children with autism and their parents need to get over to secure the support and education to which they are entitled. The NICE quality standard on autism recommends a maximum wait of three months from referral to first diagnostic appointment. It is clear that currently that standard is too often breached, and that the waiting time can be gamed by delaying later appointments. Some children have quite literally been left waiting to wait.

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): My constituent Patrick Samuel had to wait nine years before he was diagnosed with autism. It was only when he was diagnosed that he got the drugs and support that he needed. He is now a flourishing, successful artist. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is totally unacceptable for someone to have to wait for nine years?

**Paula Sherriff**: I think all Members would concur that waiting nine years is absolutely unacceptable. To be fair, that is at one end of the waiting-time limit, but it is clear that there are many delays in many areas, often running to years. One local authority has recently admitted that it has delays of 125 weeks. Collectively, Members from all parties need to work together to try to bring down delays of that length, because they mean that support and intervention may be less effective when it arrives, and lead to parents losing confidence in the system. As with many other conditions, illnesses or whatever we call them—it is difficult to find a suitable noun that actually describes autism—early intervention is absolutely the key.

There is clear evidence that a positive experience in the diagnostic process is associated with lower levels of stress and more effective coping strategies for families.

[Paula Sherriff]

We have heard in previous debates about the lack of data on waiting times. This April is meant to see the start of new standards on the collation and publication of such data. I hope the Minister will update the House on where we are with that. There is a need for better data on the number of diagnoses and who is being diagnosed with autism, so that we can identify where there are gaps. The National Autistic Society has reported that more than three quarters of people who use its adult services are male, but there is a concern that that may be related to a lack of recognition for women and girls with autism. Similarly, there is a generation of people for whom autism was not a recognised condition when they were younger.

**Bob Stewart:** I rise in support of the hon. Lady's point. I bet there are a heck of a lot of people who have autism, and no one can really understand that they have it—they probably do not understand it—but a lot of people are like that and they are adults.

**Paula Sherriff:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

NICE recently recommended the creation of an autism register so that areas where autism may be under-diagnosed can be identified. Following that, the Government committed to including autism in the primary care register. Will the Minister update the House on the implementation plans for this scheme?

We must also ensure that post-diagnosis support is in place. We know that parents have raised concerns about being left with no support during and after the diagnostic process, not being signposted to other advice and help, and not even getting a written report of the diagnosis. Too often, there are significant barriers to accessing the right treatment. In a previous debate, we heard the shocking case of a young boy who was having suicidal thoughts, but was rejected four times for treatment because he had not yet made an attempt to take his own life. The Children's Commissioner for England confirmed concerns about that issue when she stated to the Health Committee that this type of situation was now "the norm" within children's mental health services. That is worrying for children's wellbeing generally, but particularly so for those living with autism.

**Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op):** Does my hon. Friend agree that we need increased support in schools? Nearly 77% of parents say that their child has to wait more than six months for support at school. It is just as important that a child gets support at school as in the health system.

**Paula Sherriff:** Once again, I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I will go on to talk about that matter in a moment.

GPs may also need to tailor the way in which they communicate with patients. For instance, they may need to use clear language, or to find ways to communicate with somebody who does not speak. To do that, GPs must be able to access detailed and accurate records about their patients' needs. Currently, GPs often do not record much information about their autistic patients, and may not even record at all that a patient is autistic.

The five year forward view for mental health recommended that NHS England should develop autism-specific mental health care pathways. If the Minister could give us any more information on that I would be very grateful indeed.

As I alluded to earlier, early intervention is key for communication and language skills, which are closely linked to life chances for people with autism. Perhaps the Minister could address the new communication therapies that are being trialled, such as pre-school autism communication therapy, and the pilot studies in Plymouth and Bangor to test new post-diagnosis support programmes. If these programmes are successful, what steps will the Government take to ensure that they are rolled out?

In education, children with autism and other special needs are all too often paying the price for cuts. The first real-terms cuts in school budgets for a generation have put enormous pressure on schools. The vast majority of school budgets are spent on staff costs, and that makes it hard for schools to keep their current staff and maintain the necessary level of pastoral provision. As a constituency MP, I know how the cuts have hit my own borough of Kirklees. The Government's new funding formula leaves councils needing to take money for central high-needs funding from the amount allocated to schools. That means that schools may now face a cut of up to 1.5% in per-pupil funding.

More than 4,000 children in England with approved education, health and care plans still receive no provision. There was an increase from 1,710 in 2016 to 4,050 in 2017, which was five times the number in 2010. The impact on children with autism was laid bare by the recent inquiry by the all-party group. More than four in 10 families have been turned away when asking for the extra help that their child needs, and 70% of parents said that their child waited more than six months for support at school, with 50% waiting more than a year. I could go on with yet more shocking statistics, but I think the reality is evident. Does the Minister have any response to the all-party group's recommendations?

If we let down children with autism in education, the impact is felt when they become adults seeking employment, as we have heard from a number of Members this afternoon. In 2015, the Government pledged to halve the disability employment gap, but they watered that down in their 2017 manifesto. Analysis from the TUC found that the Government were years behind schedule on their 2015 manifesto commitment to halve the disability employment gap, and at current rates of progress that would take until 2030 to achieve.

There is an urgent need for improved in-work support for people with disabilities. The Government must act to strengthen and enforce workplace rights, and to improve support for employers to help their employees to stay in work. That would be good for everyone, because a 10% rise in the rate of disability employment would represent a £12 billion gain to the Exchequer.

The autism employment gap is even wider than the disability employment gap. Over the past 10 years, there has been no real change in the numbers of autistic people in full-time work, with the percentage rising from 15% to just 16%. The National Autistic Society found that less than a third of autistic adults were in some kind of paid work, even though more than three quarters wanted to work. There are concerns that this is

not even monitored, so perhaps the Minister will address that point. The NAS has also called for an autism employment pathway, an awareness programme for employers and targets for getting people with autism into work. I hope that the Minister can tell us how the Government intend to respond.

Finally, there is the simple question of awareness, which we have touched on a number of times this afternoon, with contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire), for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) and for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), my right hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley (Mr Howarth), the hon. Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins), for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) and for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers), and my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman). The research shows that only a small minority of people with autism feel that the condition is widely understood. The work of the charities and other organisations in this area is commendable, and hon. Members who have spoken today have done their bit to raise awareness. Will the Minister tell us how the Government will do the same?

The testimonies that we have heard from Members this afternoon starkly show just how crucial it is that more is done on the issue. The power to make meaningful change is in the Government's hands. I hope that they have listened and will act accordingly.

3.16 pm

**The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage):** I will start by heaping praise on my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for securing this important debate and her incredible work over many years to raise the awareness of autism both within and outside this place. It is thanks to her ground-breaking private Member's Bill on autism that we now have an adult autism strategy. Next year, it will be 10 years since her Bill became the Autism Act 2009, transforming services for autistic adults and having a huge impact on public awareness of autism. That is entirely down to her.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Caroline Dinenage:** I am not going to give way too much because I have a lot to get through, but I will definitely give way to my right hon. Friend.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan:** I thank the Minister and other Members who have acknowledged that I have had a part to play in this. She is sitting next to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland); he and Members of all parties have contributed to this work. I assure the Minister that no one MP can do this on her own. My tribute is to all those people who have done the hard work and the heavy lifting.

**Caroline Dinenage:** My right hon. Friend is as honourable and modest as ever. I also want to thank all the other Members who have worked long and hard on this over a number of years, and those who have contributed so beautifully today. This high-quality debate has included strong personal stories and great examples of fantastic constituency work.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for enabling this debate to happen during World Autism Awareness Week. It has given us the opportunity to draw much-needed

attention to the challenges that autistic people, and their families and carers, face on a daily basis. Members who have spoken are absolutely right to say that we need to understand more about autism across all sectors of society and in all parts of government. I share their determination to address this important issue.

Since the introduction of the autism strategy in 2010, it has done much to improve the lives of those living with autism, but we know that there is still much to be done. As hon. Members may be aware, we have recently put in place revised governance arrangements to continue taking forward the strategy. On Monday I had the pleasure of chairing the first annual accountability meeting, where I heard from key stakeholders, self-advocates and partners about the challenges facing autistic adults across England and how we can keep making progress in realising the ambitious autism strategy.

**Mr Sheerman:** Will the Minister give way?

**Caroline Dinenage:** May I make a little bit of progress? I will take questions if I manage to get through this wad of paper.

In reference to a point made by the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) and for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), there were representatives at that meeting from all the other Government Departments, including the Department for Transport, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Education and the Home Office. The hon. Gentlemen were absolutely right to point out that this subject reaches all Government Departments. It was clear that the complexity of autism and the multifaceted nature of the needs of those on the spectrum pose particularly challenging questions. Frequently this results in regional disparities that are far too wide in autism diagnosis waiting times and in the services someone can access once they have a diagnosis. Some areas are doing well, but others are not, and we need to ensure that good practice is identified and shared across all areas.

Many Members have highlighted particular challenges that autistic children face in school. My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) explained exactly why it is important that autistic children are well supported in their education if we are to raise their attainment and improve their life chances. The Government congratulate the all-party group on autism on its report about education in England, which was published in November. It is really important that support for young people with autism is targeted where it will be most effective. The recommendations of that report are being considered by the Department for Education and will be key to its plans. As my hon. Friend said, all teachers are now trained to help children with conditions such as autism as part of their teacher training. Since 2011, we have funded the Autism Education Trust to provide autism awareness training for more than 150,000 education staff—not just headteachers, teachers and teaching assistants, but support staff such as receptionists and dinner ladies, thereby encouraging a whole-school approach to supporting children.

Exclusions were mentioned by a number of Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Henley, my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) and the hon. Members for Cardiff

[*Caroline Dinénage*]

West and for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin). We are funding work via the Autism Education Trust to provide advice to parents and professionals on trying to cut down the number of exclusions. We have introduced the biggest reforms to special educational needs and disability support in a generation; introduced education, health and care plans that are tailored to a child's needs; and given councils £223 million extra funding to help them to introduce these significant reforms.

Diagnosis was mentioned by many hon. Members. Adults and children should not have to face long waiting times for autism diagnosis. We will continue to work with partners to try to address these long waiting times. This is also a key part of the task and finish group that is being led by NHS England. We have included autism indicators in the mental health services dataset, with data beginning to be collected from 1 April this year. This is a real step forward. We need such robust, comparable data to be regularly collected and monitored so that we can be certain of the true extent of the problems not just on waiting times for diagnosis, but on post-diagnostic outcomes. In the Think Autism strategy, we are clear that there should be a pathway to diagnosis, care and support in every local area so that we improve recognition, speed up the process of diagnosis, and meet individuals' advice and support needs.

I have previously described my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) as a force of nature, and today we saw another example of that. She spoke about regional centres of excellence—a fabulous idea—and said that there is nothing wrong with people with autism; they are just different. I had the pleasure of meeting her different and fabulous son James for an evening in Edinburgh last summer. I would hate to be on the receiving end as somebody she encountered in a shop giving her fine young gentleman a hard time.

**Mr Sheerman:** Will the Minister give way before she concludes, as she said she would?

**Caroline Dinénage:** If you will give me a little extra time to complete my remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker, yes.

**Mr Sheerman:** I am grateful to the Minister, who is making an excellent speech. I just wanted to get her to say something about the report we launched yesterday—I know she could not make the event—about people selling harmful interventions to individuals on the autism spectrum. Does she believe that that is a problem?

**Caroline Dinénage:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this; I know that he has done so at Health questions in the past. The Department of Health and Social Care does not in any way condone any of the so-called cures or remedial substances that are being proffered. We do not think that any of them are any good whatsoever.

Last year, NICE's indicator advisory committee recommended including autism diagnosis in a menu of GP indicators. A review of the quality and outcomes framework is being undertaken by NHS England, and it will conclude later this spring. NHS England has confirmed that the GP autism register will be considered in the context of this work.

We know that there are sometimes issues with the health gap. The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) raised the case of her constituent, Matthew, which shows how horrible things can be when they do go wrong. I will be very happy to meet her to ensure that Matthew's experience is not in vain.

Many Members raised issues around employment. We know that having a job is not just about earning a living, as it also contributes to people's wellbeing, gives them a sense of belonging and purpose, and builds self-confidence and self-esteem. Through the Disability Confident scheme, the Department for Work and Pensions is engaging with employers and helping to promote the skills, talents, abilities and value of people with autism. Additionally, Access to Work has a hidden impairment support team that gives advice and guidance to help employers to support employees with conditions such as autism, to offer eligible people an assessment to find out their needs at work, and to help to develop a support plan.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow, the brilliant Chair of the Education Committee, who is passionate about apprenticeships, made a brilliant point about the need for more focus on ensuring that children do not drop off the edge when they leave school. We will certainly take that forward. In December, the DWP published "Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability", which set out how it will deliver on its ambitious plan to help 1 million more people with a range of disabilities into work.

On the civil service becoming an autism-friendly employer, we have committed to support the autism exchange programme, and the civil service is working with Ambitious about Autism to provide work placement opportunities for young people.

On access to democracy, under Representation of the People Acts, polling stations must be as accessible as possible to disabled voters. We recognise that there might be specific challenges, and we will explore with the Electoral Commission what further adjustments can be made.

A few Members talked about the criminal justice system. The Ministry of Justice is working with the Home Office and the Crown Prosecution Service to develop a guide to help officers to identify people with autism. That is now included as part of all police training. NHS England has also issued a revised liaison and diversion specification, which includes autism. To date, eight prisons and young offenders institutions, including Feltham, where the programme started, are part of the criminal justice accreditation scheme, and another 35 are currently looking at the process.

I am really disappointed to hear examples from Members across the House of bad experiences with jobcentre staff, PIP, work capability assessments and so on. All healthcare professionals conducting work capability assessments and other things receive extensive training regarding autism spectrum disorder as part of their new entrant training. All work coaches in jobcentres receive the same training, but I will pass those comments on to the Department for Work and Pensions.

The hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) is clearly a true champion for autism in her local area, and I give her massive credit for what she does. She mentioned loneliness. I will be working closely

with the Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), in developing the cross-Government strategy on loneliness, which is supported by the Prime Minister.

We have heard wonderful examples of great community projects offering fantastic support in different Members' local areas, and I should give a shout-out to the incredible Marvels and Meltdowns in my constituency—a blatant plug.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) mentioned poor mental health. Obviously that is not an inevitable consequence of autism, but if someone has autism and a mental health problem, it is essential that they can get the appropriate help and support.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) highlighted worrying figures about suicide. We are committed to tackling suicide in every community and for everyone who is at risk, and we updated the national suicide prevention strategy last year to strengthen delivery on key areas.

I want to join the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) in paying tribute to the National Autistic Society and its Too Much Information campaign, Autism Alliance, Autistica and various other charities throughout the country that do fantastic work to raise awareness and offer support.

We all want to live in a world and in a country where autism is never a barrier to the opportunity afforded to others. World Autism Awareness Week enables us to continue keeping this issue high on the agenda and in the minds of policy makers, professionals and members of the public alike, which is where it should be.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that World Autism Awareness Week 2018 runs from 26 March to 2 April; believes that there is a lack of understanding of the needs of autistic people and their families; and calls on the Government to improve the support provided to autistic children in school and to autistic adults in or seeking employment, to reduce waiting times for autism diagnosis, and to promote a public awareness campaign so people can make the changes necessary for the UK to become autism-friendly.

## Easter Adjournment

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Backbench Business debate on matters to be considered before the forthcoming Adjournment. This debate, appropriately, will be opened by the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns).

3.29 pm

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

I begin, Mr Speaker, by wishing you and your staff, all right hon. and hon. Members and their families and all the staff of this House, who keep us going so well, a happy Easter. I think everyone is truly looking forward to this break, although some of us have local elections to fight during that time.

I want to bring to the House's attention the perverse nature of the Government's decision to award the passport printing contract to a Franco-Dutch company that is partly owned by the French Government. It is right that the UK follows both European Union and World Trade Organisation rules when considering any tender process and that we continue to maintain close relationships with our neighbours and allies as we leave the EU, but the Government have serious questions to answer about the assessment or apparent lack of assessment of the economic impact of this decision on the north-east, including my constituency and the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist), where De La Rue resides.

As hon. Members may well know, De La Rue, which has printed UK passports for the past decade, submitted a bid to continue that service, but the great British blue passport is going to be made in the EU—probably in France. We certainly do not want to shun trade with our continental neighbours, but to suggest that defending jobs at home is to shun trade abroad is simply false. De La Rue provides hard-fought-for, well-paid jobs for some 600 workers at the Gateshead plant alone, about 100 of whom work on printing British passports.

I would not ordinarily promote the *Daily Mail*, but its online petition opposing this decision now has more than 200,000 signatures. In addition, an e-petition on the Government and Parliament site has over 32,000 signatures from people demanding a Government response to the question at hand.

In a post-Brexit Britain, we must ensure that jobs at home are secured. The Government would be wrong to push forward during the Easter recess with the plan to export the production of British passports. The savings on the contract will surely be offset by the loss of revenue to the Exchequer from employee and employer taxes—income tax, national insurance and corporation tax—not to mention the loss of spending power in the local community on the part of workers who spend their hard-earned money in local businesses. Placing jobs at risk is surely not worth the savings expected from the current plan.

The Government tout the idea of making the passport affordable for all, but the Home Office has increased the fees on passports across the board. Online applications for a new passport have gone up by nearly 4%, while people applying via the post are seeing an even more

[*Ian Mearns*]

substantial increase of £12.50 per passport application, which represents a 17% increase. While the Government are making savings on the contract by giving it to Gemalto, they are not actually passing on those savings to the people buying passports. That should be remembered because, after all, we are here to serve those people. Incredibly, there will be a 27% increase in the cost of a child's passport application, which surely cannot be right.

What a sham it is that the Government claim to be getting a deal for their people, when they are in fact raising costs and exporting British jobs at the same time. The French Government and people, on the grounds of national security, would never countenance printing their passports in Britain, but our Government are more wedded to free market economics than to Britain's national security, national integrity and national pride. We need a robust debate on a better solution than what is currently planned, and it should occur after the recess.

Apprenticeships and jobs are hot topics in the north-east of England, as they often are in this House, but the current statistics do not reflect the Government's ambition. As the year progresses, the number of unemployed claimants in my constituency continues to rise. Just last month, there are, since February, nearly 300 more claimants, and 5.5% of the economically active population find themselves unemployed. Under-employment and unemployment continue to plague the north-east region, with youth unemployment up 2%.

Touting the current unemployment figures as a positive for the region is merely a smokescreen. Regionally, unemployment in the north-east is one percentage point higher than in the rest of the country, but this number does not take into account the people who have given up looking for work altogether. In addition, wages continue to be below those pre the financial crisis of 2007 to 2009. While fewer people may be out of work, those in work are earning far less than their counterparts a decade ago, as the cost of living has risen.

Data released in February show that the Government are failing to hit their marks on apprenticeship recruitment and apprenticeship opportunities, thus failing our young people and employers. According to figures from the Department for Education, between May and July 2017, 48,000 people began an apprenticeship. That is fewer than half the 117,000 apprenticeships begun in the same period in 2016—a staggering 61% decrease. Such numbers are hardly surprising given the intrinsic flaws in the apprenticeship levy. The lack of flexibility in the value of levy contributions, which large employers can pass down the supply chain to smaller subcontractors who work for them, is key. That is especially true for trades jobs, which larger firms often tend to subcontract down the supply chain.

The apprenticeship levy scheme must be radically reformed to serve better the hardest hit communities and young people looking to join the workforce. Although levels of unemployment for people over 50 may have gone down, youth unemployment has increased in my constituency. Compound that with the troubled roll-out of universal credit and the plan to outsource the production

of British passports and it is easy to wonder whether the Government truly care about the economy of the north-east.

There is also a genuine crisis facing the social care sector regarding sleep-in workers, although not many people seem to know about it. The Government provide funding for sleep-in staff who work with people with severe learning difficulties. Sleep-in shifts are an integral part of the public services provided by the Government, but for the past six years, the Government have not funded those services at the national minimum wage, and HMRC is now pursuing providers for six years of back pay. The providers are procured by local government contracts with money directly funded by central Government, and the shortfall is estimated at £400 million in liabilities for providers in that sector. This is a crisis for social care providers and the people who need those services most—those with learning difficulties and the most vulnerable. That unexpected cost on providers is threatening the viability of the care sector, and 69% of local authorities have reported service failure due to this issue. According to the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services, a provider in Blackpool is reportedly closing and others are handing back contracts that they are now unable to fulfil.

The Government must step in and fund that back pay to prevent the crisis from spiralling out of control. If unfunded, the sector could produce a rash of mini-Carillions. Vulnerable people will suffer; thousands of care workers will lose their jobs; and local authorities and NHS trusts will be unable to cope with the consequences. The social care sector should not, and cannot, afford to fund that service. The Government must face up to their responsibilities, otherwise we risk the care of vulnerable people.

Last Friday, I had the privilege of meeting a group of people—mainly grandparents—who are kinship carers for their grandchildren or extended families. Those kinship carers get very little support from the state and often look after children—sometimes several children—who have a range of personal, health and educational difficulties, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, attachment disorders, foetal alcohol syndrome, autism and behavioural difficulties. Those kinship carers diligently care for their children and often suffer in impoverished circumstances because their caring commitments take up so much time that they cannot work. They deserve our support and have been ignored for too long.

Finally—I will rattle through this—let me mention the upcoming Great Exhibition of the North. It begins on 22 June and is a free, summer-long event to celebrate the pioneering spirit of the north of England. Poetry, music, theatre, art galleries, life sciences and urban design will all be on display, highlighting the creative impact of our inventors, artists and designers. My constituency is excited to host such a world-class event, and the exhibition will attract attendees from all over the UK, Europe and beyond. The Great Exhibition of the North will be the largest event in the country to take place this year. Newcastle and Gateshead will become an even more visionary destination that will not only tell the story of the north and its people, but showcase everything that is great about them. Organisers, volunteers, contributors and artists have brought great pride to the community, and I hope hon. Members will join me in commending them for their work. This massive

collaboration is sure to change any preconceptions about the north, and I hope that many Members will join me in attending this magnificent exhibition, and get north.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** I am most grateful to the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. On account of the level of interest, I am afraid that it is necessary, with immediate effect, to apply a limit of five minutes each on Back-Bench speeches. We will begin with Sir David Amess.

3.40 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Before the House adjourns for the Easter recess, there are a number of points I wish to raise very quickly.

I am delighted that we are leaving the European Union. Our Prime Minister has had a great deal to put up with in the past year. She has had to hold the hand of the American President and she is continually kissed on either cheek by European bureaucrats, yet she has got us to a wonderful point as we leave the European Union. I absolutely agree that Brexit means Brexit and we are going to make a success of it.

It is crazy that Southend is not a city. We should be declared a city. As part of the bonus as we leave the European Union, we are going to have a trade fair. We are going to invite countries from all over the world to trade their goods and services with Southend.

I am very worried about the number of Asian elephants. The number has fallen dramatically from 1 million to 42,000. The elephant tourism industry is not helping the situation.

Having participated in the “Save Live Music” rally outside Parliament, I backed the Planning (Agent of Change) Bill, promoted by the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar). We should, however, also tackle the excessive pricing of music tickets and those in the entertainment industry more broadly. Being disappointed when attempting to purchase tickets online is one thing, but this disappointment is further compounded when tickets appear, often within seconds of selling out, on websites for an extortionately inflated price. That has got to stop.

I have previously raised the matter of diesel particulate filters. There is a loophole in the law and it needs to be addressed.

I was delighted to welcome the Secretary of State for Health to our first-class hospital in Southend earlier in the year. I congratulate all the women and men who work there. I await the outcome of the sustainability and transformation partnership consultation, which finished on 23 March.

A wonderful local constituent, Carla Cressy, has highlighted the plight of women with endometriosis. I have now become a trustee of her charity and will work with her to heighten awareness of that debilitating illness.

I have raised the issue of food labelling. I support Diabetes UK and Compassion in World Farming in calling for better labelling.

Hepatitis C is an illness that can be cured. It is a deadly virus, and I hope the House will unite to make sure that everyone is cured of it.

On 15 March, I sent a letter on funeral poverty, which was signed by 22 other Members of Parliament, to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. I asked her to look again at the £700 cap currently imposed on funeral expenses within the social fund funeral payment. The cap has been in place for 15 years. It needs to be changed.

Last month, I had the privilege of visiting a refugee camp in Malatya in Turkey, where some 10,000 Syrian refugees are living. What we saw was heartbreaking, but the camp is extremely well run. It is absolutely incredible how it was built within such a short space of time.

With a constituent, I had a meeting with the Fisheries Minister. I see a clear way forward for fishermen in Southend.

I took part in a debate about live exports. Transporting live animals for slaughter is totally unsatisfactory.

I was very disappointed that my ten-minute rule Bill was objected to on the Friday before last. I cannot understand why. It is a very good Bill that would end fuel poverty.

There is a lot of controversy about the Cayman Islands, but I think they are being badly treated at the moment. I have made overtures to the Secretary of State for International Trade for them to be included in the GREAT festival, which the UK is hosting in Hong Kong this month.

The Music Man project in my constituency is now in the Guinness book of records for tinging the most triangles. We look forward to an event at the Royal Albert Hall.

Later this year, I am celebrating 35 years in Parliament—well, I say that I am celebrating—and it is also the 50th anniversary of Leigh Orpheus male voice choir, which will be presiding at the event.

Rossi’s ice cream is the best in the world. We need to sell it in the House.

I visited the ambulance centre in Chelmsford last month, and I pay a full tribute to all the women and men who work under increasing pressures.

Thanks to the spring clean initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), we had a spring clean in Southend.

I close, Mr Speaker, by wishing you, all your deputies, all colleagues and all the people who work here a very happy Easter.

3.45 pm

**Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): It is my honour to be a co-chair of the drug, alcohol and justice parliamentary group, which is just one of the many parliamentary groups founded and facilitated by Simeon Andrews, who died suddenly last month. I was among a number of Members from both Houses who attended his funeral on Monday, and judging by the number of Members from every party who signed the early-day motion in his honour, many more would wish to express gratitude for his support over the years and send condolences to his partner, Cathy, and their daughter, Lilly.

[Mary Glindon]

As a member of the group, I draw colleagues' attention to the tragic fact that drug-related deaths in this country are at an all-time high. This already alarming situation could be made worse by fentanyl and its related analogues. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid analgesic that is similar to morphine, but 50 to 100 times more potent. This drug has already contributed to the opioid death epidemics in both Canada and the USA. Members may recall that fentanyl caused the death of the singer, Prince, almost two years ago.

In England during the last year, there have been reports of drug-related deaths linked to fentanyl and an increase in police seizures, leading to health warnings being issued by Public Health England. The main supply of fentanyl in our country comes from China, from where the drug is smuggled by ship to the UK and then made available to users, mainly by sale on the dark net. With drug-related deaths in England and Wales at an all-time high, it is imperative that the Government act swiftly to prevent fentanyl significantly exacerbating the crisis. Will the Deputy Leader of the House please ask the relevant Health Minister to meet the drugs, alcohol and justice parliamentary group to discuss this pressing issue?

I would like to touch on another matter, which I hope will be of interest to smokers in this House and across the country. The UK Vaping Industry Association is the organiser of VApril, designating the coming month of April as an education and awareness month targeted at the 7.6 million smokers in the UK to help them to break their habit through switching to vaping and so improve their health. The campaign, fronted by TV doctor, Christian Jessen, will encourage smokers to take the VApril challenge. There will be vaping masterclasses at specialist retail stores across 70 cities in the UK, at which smokers will learn more about different products and nicotine strengths that can help them to quit smoking successfully.

A recent review by Public Health England highlighted that vaping is 95% less harmful than smoking and that it was one of the most successful ways to quit conventional cigarettes. Not only is vaping less harmful for smokers, but it is a lot less expensive than buying cigarettes and has none of the problems associated with secondary smoking. At least 40% of smokers have not even tried vaping yet, so I hope that next month will be the time that they do. I urge colleagues, especially those who are smokers, to find out more about the VApril challenge and to spread the word in their constituencies to help smokers move towards quitting cigarettes and improving their health, as well as their wealth.

Finally, I wish you, Mr Speaker, and everyone across the parliamentary estate a very happy Easter and happy recess.

3.49 pm

**Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger** (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): The House may not be surprised by the subject about which I will be speaking. I will be speaking about it because the Government have just announced that two councils are to be merged, and I will be speaking on behalf of my constituents.

I was very pleased to hear from the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns) about the festival of the north. I have a slight vested interest in Newcastle, and I think that it is fantastic news. I urge colleagues to go to Newcastle, which is a very beautiful city—partly because we built it.

I welcome the chance to contribute to the debate, although what I have to say will not please everyone. I want to tell the House about a town hall in Somerset that is being spoon-fed huge sums of public money and, I am afraid, wasting every penny. The name of the waster is Taunton Deane Borough Council—unfortunately, because it has just been announced that it will be amalgamated with my local council, West Somerset. It had ambitions to take over the council, and last week the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government gave it the thumbs up.

Most people shook their heads in disbelief and shock, including the locals in Taunton Deane, as they read the latest letters in the local paper. The Taunton Deane councillors plan to change the council's name, sack more than a third of the workforce, spend millions of pounds that, unfortunately, we do not have on computers that do not seem to work, make themselves comfy in new offices on which they are spending £11 million although they are worth £5 million, and then come begging to Whitehall when it all goes wrong. Even the unions, which have been instrumental in providing information, agree with that.

In these dark corners of local government, incompetence rules, and we often find greed as well, not to mention sharp practice in many cases—not just in my area—and occasionally, I am afraid, corruption. Taunton Deane Borough Council has been making a dodgy name for itself for many years, long before my time, and has been rattling its tin in Whitehall for ages. The Government recently handed it £7 million to pay for a new road, which runs along the edge of my boundary. It never occurred to anyone that you cannot sanction a brand-new housing estate unless you build a brand-new road first.

What Taunton Deane is very good at is dishing out planning permission to builders. It is a tiny council, but, believe it or not, it wants to build 17,000 new houses. The effects of that on the roads and the infrastructure will be devastating for my constituents. A great many of those houses will be erected by people—dare I call them mates?—in the local area. The hon. Member for Gateshead will recall the days of Poulson and others. The council leader, believe it not, is a builder. Mates' rates matter big time in Taunton, and these mates all work around Taunton.

What gets my goat is that, while laying concrete on its green fields, the council has the bare-faced cheek to pretend that it has an environmentally friendly master plan. The Government have rewarded it with a few hundred thousand pounds, which, admittedly, is not a lot in the scheme of things, but it is pretending that a few more badly planned housing estates will add up to a shiny garden town. The idea of garden towns is to build something new, and to aspire, but that does not apply in this case. Taunton Deane specialises in dreams in my area, which is a bit worrying, especially with Glastonbury down the road. Its latest lunacies include borrowing millions of pounds to tart up its headquarters, and trying to buy a hotel. Why a local council should want to buy a hotel is slightly beyond me.

The council's leadership is rather like Arthur Daley, in a three-wheeled Reliant, flogging "cut and shut" Cortinas to unsuspecting civil servants. They will probably all end up in the canal. What saddens me is that the Government so often cave in too quickly and pay up. I would say the same about Governments on either side of the House. We must stand up against petty bureaucracies. Underfunding may be a problem, but overfunding is a downright scandal.

The future of West Somerset council, in my constituency, is being dictated by a group of people who have no interest in it whatever. It has 28 councillors, and the number will go down to roughly 15, perhaps 14. Taunton Deane has demanded red lines. It has no code of conduct, and no precept for any of its parishes. There is no town council in a town that contains about 100,000 people. The whole thing is run by someone who has a pointed beard and looks like Arthur Daley.

The point I am making is that this is not the way to conduct local government. My area is the sparsely populated part of England, because we have Exmoor and the Quantocks, which is an area of outstanding natural beauty. We cannot build on the coastline. We have enormous flood plains, which, as many of my colleagues will remember, have been affected rather devastatingly. Our room for manoeuvre is very tight. We have one secondary—we do not need any more, to be fair—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I call Martin Whitfield.

3.54 pm

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): It is great to speak just before the recess to support my colleague in Holyrood, Daniel Johnson MSP, in his campaign to find proper support for those diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. I am proud to sponsor early-day motion 1112, which refers to an unfortunate documentary distributed by Netflix entitled "Take Your Pills". Here in the UK, there are too many people who wait too long for diagnosis and the support they do receive is fragmented and ineffective. Those diagnosed with ADHD deserve our respect and support and their contribution to society is enormous and truly valued.

The situation for young people is even more desperate. Across the House, we are aware of the needs of all young people, as is our whole society. The difference is that within this House we can do something to make a difference. ADHD carries a stigma occasioned sometimes by ignorance and, in some cases, by fear. A lifetime with ADHD should be not a lifetime lost but a lifetime saved. ADHD is a neuro-developmental disorder and there is no doubt that with the right combination of understanding and care, the benefits to individuals and society are clear. When it goes wrong, the results can sadly be dramatic.

With the right support, those who live with the condition can achieve anything—they include Olympic athletes, Michelin-starred chefs, entrepreneurs, doctors, artists and even MPs—but most importantly those who are diagnosed, if properly supported, can lead happy fulfilling lives rather than feeling alone and unsupported, and being more at risk of bipolar disorders, anxiety disorders and depression. That brings me to my early-day motion and the Netflix documentary. Those behind the documentary might well have been well intentioned,

and the programme could have taken a positive approach to ADHD, but unfortunately it failed to do so. The documentary looked at the medication prescribed to those diagnosed to help manage their condition, but the language it chose to use and the comparison with unregulated and illegal drugs paints a far from real picture of the medication. The documentary makes little attempt to show the effects of the medication when prescribed, compared with when the same medication was abused by those without a diagnosis. Indeed, taking the medication for other reasons would be illegal in the US.

Diagnosis of ADHD should lead to treatment to help relieve the symptoms and make the condition much less of a problem in day-to-day life. ADHD can be treated using medication or therapy, but, as the NHS advises, it is often best done with a combination of both. Medication is not a cure for ADHD, but it may help someone with the condition concentrate better, be less impulsive, feel calmer, and learn and practise new skills. Treatments that include therapy go beyond medication, and indeed the therapy and strategies apply not only to those who suffer from ADHD but to their families and teachers and to the communities around them. I congratulate the Scottish ADHD Coalition on its employers' guide to ADHD in the workplace.

The documentary is clumsy. Medication for those diagnosed is important and misuse of medication is dangerous. On behalf of people who are diagnosed with ADHD, I would like to say first, among many things, that ADHD is real. It is not cured by drugs. Treatment can help manage the condition. It is not a condition of hyperactive boys. There is a prevalence among boys, but girls can also have ADHD. That is important, because in later life gender bias in relation to ADHD can lead to late diagnosis and poorer support.

Much still needs to be said, but let me finish by expressing my thanks to those who worked on #Bornto beADHD, to the all-party parliamentary group in Parliament and, on a personal note, to Daniel Johnson MSP, who is my friend and who has ADHD.

I want to wish us all a peaceful Easter. At a time when people's thoughts are about others and the strength of hope, please remember that people with ADHD are not different—they are exceptional.

3.59 pm

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): This afternoon, I should like to talk about a subject that has been much in the news recently—namely, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence. I also want to talk about the Royal Air Force Regiment, which currently has key responsibility for protecting us in the United Kingdom. I gather that the RAF Regiment was hugely instrumental in cleaning up after the Salisbury chemical weapon attack recently. Since the second world war, the RAF has had the service lead for defending us against nuclear, biological and chemical—NBC—attacks. In 2002, the collective term was widened to include radiological attacks and thus became chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear—CBRN—defence. The RAF NBC defence capability has always been vested in 27 Squadron of the RAF Regiment. Coincidentally, that squadron was once commanded by Jock Stewart MC, who happens to be my father. I am proudly wearing an RAF Regiment tie

[Bob Stewart]

today, because I have the real privilege of being an honorary companion of the RAF Regiment officers' dinner club.

Apart from EU countries, states in all other continents have often sent delegations to the UK to view our RAF Regiment's specialist capabilities with a view to replicating them in their own countries. I will not attempt to name them, as there might be security implications. RAF Regiment specialist CBRN personnel provided unique assistance to the Japanese Government and other national embassies and agencies in radiation monitoring during the Fukushima nuclear incident in 2011. As I have mentioned, their expertise was also deployed to Salisbury recently.

Following the strategic defence and security review in 2015, the decision was taken to transfer the specialist CBRN defence capability to the Army. To me, that decision lacks logic, and I hope it can be stopped. The current modernising defence programme—a mini-defence review in any other terms—provides for a timely reassessment of the required specialist CBRN defence capabilities and the opportunity to challenge the SDSR 2015 decision. The RAF Regiment has amassed considerable CBRN defence knowledge, skills and expertise over many decades, and it is the acknowledged leader in CBRN defence operations in the international community.

I will lose many Army friends by saying this, but I think that the transfer of the specialist CBRN capability from the RAF to the Army could introduce significant risks to the UK's defence and security during a time of extreme uncertainty. I believe that the Ministry of Defence may wish to reconsider the wisdom of the planned transfer from the RAF to the Army and I very much hope that this capability will stay with the Royal Air Force Regiment, which has long-term proven expertise. Also, it is the one organisation that is judged to be a world leader in its class. Mr Speaker, I want to say thank you to you, your Deputy Speakers, the Clerks and all the staff of this great establishment for putting up with me for so long. I will now give you a break by going away and shutting up for two weeks. Thank you.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman represents no burden so far as the Chair is concerned. That was very self-effacing of him, and I wish him a very good break. I thank him for his characteristic courtesy.

4.3 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). I am grateful for this opportunity to raise what I and others—including my good friend, Rochdale Councillor Billy Sheerin—consider to be a much-overlooked issue. In the current Government, following the Prime Minister's last reshuffle, we have Ministers for Women and Equalities, for disabled people and for loneliness, and social care has been added to the remit of the Secretary of State for Health, but we have no Minister for older people. Yet we have 15.3 million people aged over 60 in this country. By 2035, 29% of people will be over 60. Nearly one in five people currently in the UK will live to see their 100th birthday. Some 60% of older people agree that age discrimination exists in the daily lives of older people.

The older people's champions network in the north-west, composed of local authority elected members, has been campaigning for the establishment of a post of older people's Minister, and many hon. Members will have received an email from this group asking for their support. It is a cross-party group, led by a Conservative councillor from the Ribble Valley, Susan Bibby. This group wants the post of older people's Minister to be established and to work across Departments in the same way that the Minister for Disabled People works to ensure that disabled people are not disadvantaged in any way.

With the increase in pension age, people are having to work longer to make enough money to live. The Government are in a position to encourage employers to embrace and utilise their older workforce, through the Work and Pensions Minister route and through advertising job vacancies and press releases from MPs encouraging employers in their constituencies to take on older workers. On health issues, dementia is the biggest killer in the UK today, and living well with dementia is the key to people being able to continue to contribute to society.

An older people's Minister could work more closely with Public Health England to educate on prevention and living well with diseases generally associated with later life. I am pleased to be able to talk about the great steps made towards inclusivity of older people by the combined authority of Greater Manchester, led by Mayor Andy Burnham. On 16 March 2018, Greater Manchester became the UK's first age-friendly city region as recognised by the World Health Organisation. Mayor Burnham, in addition to launching the age-friendly strategy, also announced £1 million of Sport England funding to encourage older people to be more physically and socially active.

Greater Manchester's age-friendly strategy covers a multitude of areas, including housing, health and social care, transport, art and culture, physical activity, work and welfare and benefits, as well as a campaign to positively change the way that older people are viewed. It is clear that the north-west is leading the way in making sure that older people remain valued members of our society and are able to live healthily, happily and independently for as long as possible, from the positive approach shown by Mayor Andy Burnham to the campaigning work done by the older people's champions in the north-west.

Caroline Adams, the Director of Age UK said that she would like to see a cross-cutting unit that could join up policy on older people across Departments. She said:

“What's certain though is that we can't go on as we are, with scarcely any central government resources directed at developing age-friendly policies and ensuring older people's views inform them.”

Some might argue that the Minister for loneliness might cover some of the role, but loneliness is, sadly, not exclusive to older people, and there are so many other issues that are crucial to our ageing society to enable them to have full and active lives. We live in an ageing society, and the impact and implications for us all will be immense. The creation of the role of an older people's Minister is an idea whose time has come. I hope that by next Easter such a post might be in place.

To finish, I would like to wish everyone in the House a very happy Easter.

4.8 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes). I agreed with every word she uttered.

From next Tuesday, my Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 comes into force. For the first time in this country, everyone in England who is threatened with homelessness or is homeless will have to be assisted by their local authority. This key reform means that no one should be forced to sleep rough on our streets in the future. Later this year, the various different authorities—children's social services in the case of care leavers, others in the case of armed forces veterans, ex-offenders and NHS hospital patients—will have to refer those for whom they are responsible through this system to ensure that no one is left without a home. The Government still have far more to do to combat the problem of existing rough sleepers, who will not be covered by this particular piece of legislation. However, I hope that the legislation will in time reduce the bill that we pay for temporary accommodation, which currently stands at £1.7 billion a year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) is replying to the debate and, in his previous role, he conducted the consultation on disabled access at stations, so I cannot resist the opportunity to remind him that many of my constituents applied for lifts at Stanmore and Canons Park stations. Although that is the responsibility of the Mayor of London, he has singularly failed to deliver on the promise, so I look to my hon. Friend to force him to do so by encouraging his successor, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), to provide some funding for this much-needed improvement.

On education in Harrow, I am delighted that Canons High School and Bentley Wood High School for Girls have both received substantial capital funds for improvements. Equally, I strongly support Harrow Council's application for funding for the rebuilding of Pinner Wood School. It was discovered that the school had been built on a chalk mine, so the council took the sensible decision to demolish and replace it. However, the Government have refused to fund the work, saying that Harrow Council should provide the money from council tax reserves, which is grossly unfair given that the council has taken a sensible decision for the health and safety of the children involved. I also strongly supported the application by Mariposa for a school in my constituency but, regrettably, the Department for Education rejected that sensible and strongly supported application for a school that would have been excellent.

I have applied for an Adjournment debate on my next topic, and I hope to have the opportunity to debate it after Easter, but I will outline it briefly. In 2016, my constituent Shivji Patel was carrying his grandson Kai Khetani while crossing a pedestrian crossing. The lights had gone red and he was struck down by a motorist, Ben Etheridge, who had travelled through the red light and was found to have been using his mobile phone at time of collision. Kai was two at the time and now, two years on, he is partially blind, fed through a tube, unable to communicate and in need of 24-hour care. Despite all that, the motorist concerned, who has impacted Kai's life forever, was given a two-year suspended sentence, 240 hours of community service, a three-year driving

ban and a tag for a period of three months. The driver damaged that poor child's life forever, and a custodial term is the only sentence that should have been given to him.

Turning to broadband in my constituency, the reality is that many households in Stanmore cannot get access to a decent standard of connection. Everyone thinks that that is a problem only in rural areas, but parts of London still have it despite the extra money provided by the Government.

Mr Speaker, I end by wishing you, the Deputy Speakers, all the staff of the House and all hon. Members not only a very happy Easter, but a very happy Pesach as well.

4.13 pm

**Vicky Foxcroft** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), who has done such fantastic work on the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. I also wish him good luck for his Adjournment debate; I am sure that he will not stop until he is successful.

Before we adjourn for the Easter recess, I want to use this opportunity to raise two interlinked issues, both of which are incredibly important and close to my heart: early years support and reducing youth violence. In Lewisham, Deptford, we have several great nursery schools providing excellent early childhood education and family services. I was recently contacted by the head of one of them, Cathryn Kinsey, who spoke to me about the challenges that the school is facing as a result of funding cuts, and her worries about the services that it can provide post 2020. Clyde Nursery School is based in one of the most deprived wards in Lewisham, where child poverty is particularly high. Despite that, Clyde's quality of teaching is consistently rated as outstanding by Ofsted.

Clyde also offers a range of vital services to the children's families: support to survivors of domestic violence; parenting workshops; financial advice; English language classes; employment advice; and accredited training programmes. The support on offer is truly remarkable. Clyde is an asset that the local area cannot afford to lose, but its future is uncertain. The funding formula has left the nursery struggling, and cuts of nearly 40% and a projected budget deficit of £502,000 mean that it might be forced to close by 2020. Sadly, Clyde is not alone. Some 67% of nursery schools have predicted that they will no longer be financially viable by 2020.

It would be difficult to overstate the devastating impact that those closures would have. The vast majority of nursery schools serve children in deprived areas and such schools are consistently shown to be the most effective way of improving social mobility. Study after study shows that a child's first years are critical in shaping their future health, character, success at school and future career. Nursery schools can have a genuinely transformative effect on levelling the playing field. In those early years, every experience can have a potentially profound impact on the life course of an individual, both positively and negatively.

I chair the youth violence commission, a cross-party group of MPs that seeks evidence-based policies to tackle the root causes of youth violence—it is great to

[Vicky Foxcroft]

see the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), who is also a member of the commission, in the Chamber. We have been holding a series of evidence sessions as part of our research with Warwick University, and similar themes are emerging.

Over and over again, we hear about the importance of considering adverse childhood experiences or trauma in the context of youth violence. A child who grows up with four or more adverse experiences is 10 times more likely to be involved in violence by the age of 18 than a young person who has experienced none.

It is increasingly clear that early years support is just as important to tackling youth violence as it is to tackling inequality. I hope the Government have considered the importance of early intervention and early years support in their upcoming serious violence strategy, which I understand is due to be published very soon—thankfully, it has been agreed today that we will have a debate on the strategy.

We are currently at risk of seeing some of the best early years support disappear from some of our most deprived communities. The impact of that loss will be felt for years to come in a multitude of ways. If the Government are serious about reducing youth violence, and if they are serious about social mobility, their first step must be to reverse these cuts to nursery schools before it is too late.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On the whole, it is helpful if people bob rather than assume the Chair has a psychic quality. Mr Sweeney, get in there, man.

4.18 pm

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): After nine months in the House, clearly there is still a learning curve.

I pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, to your colleagues in the Chair, and to all Members—Whips and others—who have been so generous in offering their insight and advice. As a new Member, I am having to adapt to a very unfamiliar environment and to some rather esoteric practices. The most rewarding aspect of being a new Member is having the opportunity to bring to the attention of this House, and of the wider public, affairs that I hope will improve the lot and lives of my constituents, and also improve national policy. That is why it is so important to have such debates in which we can reflect on what we have discussed in this House over the last term and consider what important matters to raise in the coming term.

The key issues I want to raise as we move towards the next term relate to the green deal. At least 167 of my constituents have had work on their homes carried out under the Government-backed green deal, but a number of them have faced significant problems following that work. One of my constituents is now unable to sell her house due to the reckless, unregulated actions of a rogue green deal installer. Many of my constituents have found themselves in tens of thousands of pounds in debt, their retirements ruined for the rest of their lives. This has played out appallingly, and we need a

debate in this House on how the Government will compensate and protect those people, who entered into these green deal arrangements in good faith, under a Government kitemark, especially now that the Government have supported new iterations of the scheme without significantly changing the regulatory framework for green deal suppliers. This is a matter of immediate urgency.

It is also important that this House discusses the case of Dr Hadiza Bawa-Garba. Many Members will have noted the recent case of this doctor, who was struck off by the General Medical Council after being convicted of gross negligence manslaughter, despite the matter being an evident case of institutional failure across the NHS that could have an impact on any junior doctor in the field. This has led to an unprecedented loss of confidence among the medical profession and across the UK in the GMC's governance. The case highlights the need for an urgent debate to consider the GMC's capacity to effectively regulate in the interests of patients' safety and so that we can restore public and practitioner confidence in it. That is a matter of immediate urgency.

I come to another matter that I have been discussing with colleagues, including in my role as a member of the all-party group on shipbuilding and ship repair. I note that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) is in the Chamber. He is another of the group's members and represents Govan shipyard. We have a common interest in the matter of Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship procurement and, in particular, in the issue of unfair state aid practices that may distort the competitive procurement of these vessels. Of particular note here is Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering, which is currently building the Tide class tankers for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and has benefited from unfair state aid assistance from the South Korean Government. We need an urgent debate to discuss the procurement of new Royal Fleet Auxiliary fleet solid support ships. Such a debate should consider whether any shipyard worldwide that is benefiting from unfair state aid will be excluded from the competition and the potential merits of holding a UK-only competition to design and construct the new fleet solid support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

In addition, it is important that the House considers the continuity Bills in relation to the devolved Administrations. Given the lack of agreement between the devolved powers and UK Government on common frameworks following our exit from the European Union, we urgently need a debate in this House on the implications of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill for the Scottish devolution settlement and the settlement for other devolved Administrations in the UK.

I welcome the scheduled debate on industrial strategy in our first week back in this House, but I emphasise that it is important that we raise the issue of public procurement as part of that debate and, in particular, the Government's lack of willingness to ensure that Government contracts and sub-contractors of Government projects abide by fair work practices. We must also discuss the need to ensure we have efficient financing practices for public procurement. That is of particular note in defence contracts, where we have seen the absurdity of in-year budget spend profiles prejudicing against efficient procurement over the longer term, which is driving longer-term costs into major public procurement

programmes. That has to be grasped and sorted out as a matter of urgency. That is in the long-term industrial interest of the UK, particularly today, as we have seen the sad demise of GKN as an independent industrial company—it is a major player in Britain's defence and aerospace sector.

I finish by saying that it has been a great pleasure to have served in the House during my nine months as a Member of Parliament. I wish everyone a very happy Easter.

4.23 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Mr Speaker, may I start by wishing you, the House staff and all Members a very enjoyable Easter break? May I encourage Members to visit the highlands, and indeed to come to my constituency, where tourism comprises 20% of the economy? It is no surprise that people choose to go there, as we have one of Europe's fastest growing cities, surrounded by stunning countryside. The growth of direct flights from Inverness airport has delivered record-breaking numbers of passengers and stays in our fabulous hotels, and our excellent restaurants are being used as well.

Why would not you, Mr Speaker, come to Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey to enjoy the snow sports in the Cairngorms or the golfing in Nairn? You could go on a cruise along Loch Ness with Jacobite Cruises. You might even choose to visit Tomatin distillery, Dalwhinnie distillery or indeed Speyside distillery, which has ambitious plans for expansion, starting with a new shop and visitor attraction in Aviemore.

We encourage cycling and walking in my constituency, and we have fantastic biking and walking trails. I pay tribute to Grantown Grammar School. Its approach to outdoor education includes fully integrating mountain biking and other activities into the school day.

**Bob Stewart:** I wish to help the hon. Gentleman by saying that my uncle was at school on the edges of Loch Ness as a boy and saw the Loch Ness monster. As a consequence, tourism expanded hugely—it was in all the Scottish newspapers. It was only at his funeral that it was allowed that that was a fake.

**Drew Hendry:** I was initially grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention, but that is a scurrilous attack on what is quite clearly one of my constituents. I will not have that and hope that he will withdraw that comment.

While in my constituency, Mr Speaker, you could pop along to the Highland Wildlife Park to congratulate the highly trained staff on the UK's first and only polar bear cub—a born highlander. Or you might take a trip to the Landmark Forest Adventure Park, which was recently awarded the Travellers' Choice award by TripAdvisor and named in the top 1% of visitor attractions worldwide. In the city, we have exciting plans for Inverness castle and the launch of a truly world-leading augmented reality app, which will put Inverness history into perspective and enable people to grasp it with their own hands.

My constituency is internationalist, diverse and welcoming. We have welcome friends, neighbours and colleagues from all over the world. The children at Central Primary School in Inverness speak 21 languages.

We are pleased to welcome Inverlingo, a new meet-up group for internationals living in Inverness so that they can be linked to EU nationals and we can share their value in our society. We will soon have the opening of the honorary Polish consulate in Inverness, too.

Our people care deeply about supporting others who need help, and I wish to thank just some of the organisations involved. Mikeysline, which recently opened the Hive in Inverness, offers a place for people aged 17 and over to drop in when they are feeling low or depressed, or when they simply need some space or support. The volunteers there do incredible work. Birchwood Highland recovery centre is the first and only mental health residential recovery centre in Inverness, and recently celebrated its 10th anniversary.

In World Autism Awareness Week, a special mention must be given to the Highland One Stop Shop and all the fantastic people who fought to keep that service open. They are delighted with the Scottish Government funding and the private donor who has committed to help them.

I thank the community transport groups that work wonders in Merkinch and Badenoch, and pay tribute to the contribution of the volunteers there. The Badenoch and Strathspey community transport group has an innovative project that matches up school kids with elderly people so that they can learn from each other skills such as IT.

The Boat of Garten community centre, and Emma Macdonald and team at the hall, put in huge effort to make sure that there is always something going on, from "Boat Reel" film screenings to family fun days and "Showboaters" theatre productions. Boat of Garten was featured on Channel 4's "Village of the Year".

I could go on and on about what is happening in my constituency. I congratulate the Inverness chamber of commerce on its 125th anniversary. I also congratulate Inverness BID—the business improvement district—on the renewal of its mandate to operate in the city.

4.28 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I join others in wishing you, Mr Speaker, and all Members and staff a happy and peaceful Easter. It is an opportunity to rest and to work with the many organisations in our constituencies. For many of us, it is an opportunity to have a good night's sleep. As someone who took a Lenten vow of no chocolate, sweets, biscuits, cake and crisps, I look forward to familiarising myself—modestly, of course—with some of those items.

This has been an excellent debate in which many Members have raised their special causes. I very much agreed with the comments made by the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), about the passport contract. I can assure the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) that the Work and Pensions Committee will be looking again at the matter of funeral poverty.

I thank the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) for mentioning Simeon Andrews and his great contribution to parliamentary groups across this House. I can assure the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) that I have signed his early-day motion on attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. He gave an excellent speech. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Lewisham,

[Chris Stephens]

Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) for her comments on the youth violence commission, and it was a pleasure to welcome its members to my constituency.

I very much associate myself with the comments on shipbuilding made by the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney). We also heard my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) talk about his beautiful constituency, despite the scurrilous remarks that were made by those on the Government Benches.

Like other hon. Members, I have tabled a number of early-day motions: early-day motion 730 praises the work of the Priesthill community breakfast; early-day motion 732 congratulates the work of the community kitchen in Hillington in my constituency; and, of course, early-day motion 733, a copy of which I handed over at a recent service, congratulates St Andrews and St Nicholas church, which collected food, clothes and toys for children for its Christmas collection. Those early-day motions demonstrate that there are still many challenges in the social security system that the Government need to address. All those organisations are doing great work and we should congratulate them, but they are not part of the social security system. What they are doing is picking up the failings of the social security system and we should not forget that.

This year is the centenary of Catholic education in Scotland, and early-day motion 735 gives us the opportunity to celebrate the contribution that Catholic schools have made to the nation of Scotland. They have done great work in improving educational standards. I was also delighted to table early-day motion 736 for Govan High School and its fundraising efforts for a pensioner who was robbed of his savings. The pupils managed to gather £1,000 in two weeks, and they should be congratulated.

There are not enough statues to women across the United Kingdom. Like many hon. Members, I was delighted to see the unveiling of the Mary Barbour statue in Govan—Mary Barbour led the rent strikes during the first world war when private landlords were putting up rents. That episode was shown in a BBC documentary. It was a privilege to be there for the unveiling of the statue and a privilege to table early-day motion 989 to celebrate the event. I also tabled early-day motion 731 on Tea in the Pot women's services, which does fantastic work for women, particularly vulnerable women, in my constituency.

Like many others, I am very concerned about the actions of the Turkish military forces in Afrin, northern Syria. The Kurdish community—I have a good Kurdish community in my constituency—is very concerned about the lack of action from the UK Government and their failure to condemn the Turkish military forces. It is quite clear that the best force in terms of rolling back Daesh has come from the Kurdish community in Syria. The actions of the Turkish Government are, quite frankly, appalling and are rolling back that work.

I hope that all hon. Members enjoy the sleep, enjoy their Easter and familiarise themselves with many of the things that I referred to earlier. I look forward to seeing them all back in April, when I and my colleagues on the SNP Benches will continue to hold this Government to account.

4.33 pm

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): May I start by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns)? He has been an assiduous Chair of the Backbench Business Committee. Some really interesting debates have come from that Committee. I agree with him that for every pound spent locally, 70p stays in the local community. I look forward to the Great Exhibition of the North, and hope that he will also be there as one of the great exhibits of the north.

The hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) continues his quest for Southend to become a city. I hope that that is finally granted and congratulate him on his 35 years in Parliament. He touched on a number of important issues including diabetes and endometriosis, and I was pleased to see a male touching on women's issues.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glendon) about Simeon Andrews, who I also worked with. He worked tirelessly for social justice, and it really was a shock when he died.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) was right to mention ADHD. There are very many exceptional people who have such conditions, many of which we do not understand, and they should be supported.

I turn to the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). What can I say about him? He is a member of the RAF dinner club. I hope that I can join him at one of those dinners. The RAF celebrates its centenary this Sunday, and we congratulate it on its great work keeping this country safe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) is right that there should be a strategy for older people. I am not sure where that hard line goes, or on which side I would fall.

**The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury (Paul Maynard):** The right side.

**Valerie Vaz:** Indeed, the right side. I am pleased that Mayor Burnham is always very keen to get us moving. I gave him a football when he came to my constituency once. His parliamentary assistant said to me, "He's not going to put it down," and he did not; he carried on kicking the football. It was great, and his strategy to get us all moving is also great.

The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has worked tirelessly for homeless people. I am pleased that his Act will be coming into effect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) is an outstanding parliamentarian. We look forward to the debate on the serious violence strategy. I am glad that that has been agreed and that the youth violence commission will report in the summer. Perhaps we can look forward to another debate then.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) has made an outstanding impact in the very short time that he has been here. He has even been on the Front Bench. I was astounded by how confident he was on his first outing, and I thank him for his contribution on behalf of the Opposition. He raised the case of Dr Bawa-Garba. I know that very many people in the medical profession are concerned about the decision in that case. I hope that someone at the General Medical Council will look at that again.

I can see why tourism accounts for 20% of the economy in the constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry). The Opposition Chief Whip has actually visited the area, although he claims to have driven around it, rather than to have walked. Maybe another attraction to the area would be if you, Mr Speaker and Roger Federer had a tennis match there.

I used to really enjoy doing these debates when I was on the Back Benches. It is a really lovely time. It is a nice debate to have before the recess. I thank all Members for attending and taking part. I get the best bit—to wish everybody a very happy and peaceful Easter.

**Mr Speaker:** I call the Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard). *[Interruption.]* Well, he is the Deputy Leader of the House for today's purposes. I am sorry if I have conferred upon him an official title that he does not possess but that is the role that he is playing today, and I thank him.

4.38 pm

**The Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury (Paul Maynard):** I enjoy learning new things every day. It is a delight to take part in a much underrated parliamentary tradition. Many of us often participate in these debates. I am disappointed that more do not realise what a great chance it is to see the better side of Parliament. Who can forget my contribution—I think that it was in 2013—when I spoke for 10 minutes on the heritage protection of the built civil nuclear environment? No one remembers it at all, but I can assure the House that it was a scintillating performance.

I find that one of the hardest things about being a Member is retaining my own sense of good will towards all Members, whatever side of the House they happen to sit on. We often forget that we all come to this place wanting to achieve the same thing, which is to make a positive difference in the communities that we serve. This can often be hard to discern as time goes by. Our debates can grow fractious. As we have heard even today, our remedies to the problems that we see day by day vary widely. We often have very different ideas as to how we should solve the problems that we come across.

Such debates underline the fact, however, that we have far more in common as Members than what divides us. The Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), is a prime example of that. Week after week, he gives us opportunities to discuss the issues that matter most to Members across this House. Today, we had one such debate on autism, and it was an excellent way to spend a profitable couple of hours. I was only disappointed that I could not speak in it myself.

My last effort before being made a Minister was to chair a review of apprenticeships for people with autism for the Department for Education. That is an amazing thing. It underlines that one does not need to be a Minister to make a difference in this place. I made that point in my maiden speech. Everywhere we go in this place, as the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Vicky Foxcroft) pointed out, we can make a real, positive difference. I think we often underestimate just how much change we can effect without standing at this Dispatch Box.

The Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee made some worthwhile points. I was delighted to hear him talk about De La Rue, which is a genuinely excellent British company printing banknotes and passports around the world. It relies on an export market that is out there. I am sure that he has heard many of the arguments that have been employed over the past few days. He will know that the legal process is ongoing. He will also know that many other jobs—some 50 jobs, I believe—have been created by the alternative bid that has been successful. The security-related work will be carried out in the UK, so there are no national security concerns. I think that we all wish De La Rue well. It is an important part of the British economy and his own local economy. I am sure that we all wish him every success in that in future.

The hon. Gentleman was right to raise the importance of the economic progress that is being made across the whole north-east. Every time we have an exchange in this Chamber, I seem to make a point about the investment that we have made in new rolling stock for the Metro—a decision that I took as a Minister at the Department for Transport. To me, that is a sign of this Government's commitment to the north-east and the importance we place on economic growth in the region.

**Mr Liddell-Grainger:** May I say, as a former major in the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, that my hon. Friend's point about the north-east is absolutely right? I had the great privilege to live there for many years. I commanded X-ray Company of the 6th Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. It is a wonderful area. There is a proposal in the north-east to have the incredible showcase that I mentioned earlier. Again, I urge all colleagues to visit it. Does my hon. Friend agree that the north-east is to be celebrated and visited?

**Paul Maynard:** I certainly agree; it is indeed an area to be celebrated. Perhaps my hon. Friend is thinking of moving to the north-east and seeking election in a constituency there—I do not know. He has spoken almost more about that area than his own.

The Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee was kind enough to mention a constituency case that I came across involving sleep-in workers. I have met two of the many organisations involved. He may be aware that my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Heidi Allen) took a delegation to see the Prime Minister to discuss this issue. The matter is before the courts, which are carefully examining exactly how this is dealt with. We are more than aware that there is an issue to be resolved. I have seen the consequences for myself in my own constituency.

My final point to the hon. Gentleman is that I am delighted that the Great Exhibition of the North is occurring in Gateshead, tinged only by slight disappointment that it is not occurring in Blackpool. However, anything that gives me a good reason to go over to Gateshead and Newcastle has to be a good thing, and I look forward to paying a visit.

I struggle to believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) has been in this House for 35 years. Once again, he showed the virtues of compression. I sometimes think that every single one of his constituents must write to him when the pre-recess Adjournment debate beckons just so that they get a mention in his speech. I am sympathetic towards city

[Paul Maynard]

status for Southend, but on one condition: if I support Southend's bid, he has to support Blackpool's. It has to be one for one.

**Sir David Amess:** If my hon. Friend is serious, I will certainly support his bid, because there is nothing to preclude more than one new city being created, so I hope that he will deal with the matter.

**Paul Maynard:** That is very true, and it is important for seaside towns to stick together whenever they can.

My hon. Friend also made an important point about elephants. I certainly agree that tourists need to be much better informed as to exactly what they are getting themselves in for. I very much welcome the support that he is giving his constituent Carla Cressy and the work that they are doing on endometriosis, which is a really important issue that does not get discussed enough.

**Sir David Amess:** Will the Minister give way?

**Paul Maynard:** On one last occasion. I am feeling generous.

**Sir David Amess:** Will my hon. Friend encourage as many Members as possible to share the information that we have on endometriosis, so that there is not stigma and we are able to give more help to women who suffer from it?

**Paul Maynard:** That is an exceedingly worthwhile point. I know that we will all want to take note of the work that my hon. Friend's group is doing and disseminate information as widely as possible throughout our constituencies.

I very much welcome the comments that the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) made about Simeon Andrews. I was very saddened to hear of his passing. He is a fantastic example of someone who greatly enhances the work we do in this place across all parties and none, and it was a great shock to hear of that. The hon. Lady also raised important points about fentanyl and the wider problems of opioids that we are seeing across our communities. I see it in my own constituency, and it is a matter of concern, so she is quite right to raise it.

I am also glad to see the hon. Lady joining in the growing fad of vaping. My hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) was talking just the other day about having more vaping areas in Parliament. Never having smoked in my life, I do not quite see the appeal, but I know that for those who have smoked, vaping might well be a way to get themselves off nicotine and on to something a little bit healthier. I wish her well in her campaign.

The hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) spoke powerfully and movingly about ADHD and his MSP colleague. That is an important issue. We understand people by the labels that we hang around our necks, but the label of ADHD is particularly misunderstood by many. If we can do more to explain properly what the condition is and how it is best treated and understood, that can only be a good thing. I wish them well in that campaign.

What do I say about my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart)? I am almost tempted to say nothing at all, because I cannot do it justice, but let me make an effort. He is quite right to draw attention to the RAF's role in CBRN. As the shadow Leader of the House said, the RAF's 100th birthday is coming up, and that may be one aspect of what the RAF is doing that we do not give sufficient attention to.

**Ian Mearns:** There is one thing that we forget: in celebrating 100 years of the RAF, we are also regretting the demise of the Royal Flying Corps, which was active for the duration of the first world war. We should not forget the Royal Flying Corps.

**Paul Maynard:** I agree entirely and thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful addition to my comments. It is important to place that on the record.

The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) made an important point about having a Minister for older people. I recall making a speech on that issue as a Back Bencher and being very supportive of it. Now that I am standing here, I am bound by collective responsibility, so she will have to guess what my thoughts are, but I wish her well in that cross-party campaign. She raises a worthwhile issue that covers many cross-departmental issues, and I know that many Ministers will want to think carefully about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) may be getting bored of people congratulating him on his Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, but even if he is, I will not stop, because he deserves praise and applause for what he has achieved. I well recall the issues around step-free access to his tube stations and the battle with Transport for London over getting the right amount of funding. He will be pleased to know that my successor, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Ms Ghani), overheard it because she is sitting right next to me.

I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East that one point I made very clear when negotiating Network Rail's funding for control period 5 was that we must have a dedicated ring-fenced fund to make sure that Access for All funding continues. I know that my hon. Friend will take up the cudgels and keep fighting to make sure that we have inclusive transport across not just London but the country as a whole. I look forward to seeing the response to the inclusive transport consultation, and I wish him well with what I hope will be his Adjournment debate on the particularly tragic case that he raised.

**Martin Whitfield:** I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but I wanted to take the opportunity to thank him for his comments about ADHD and about my colleague at Holyrood. Will he extend his compliments to the all-party group on ADHD, which does an enormous amount of work in Parliament?

If I may, I will also take the opportunity, very quickly, to say that the previous debate was on autism, and it is strange how many of the sentiments expressed by Members on both sides of the House were similar to those I found myself expressing during my speech. As the Minister has rightly pointed out, there are a range of influences on people's lives, whether it is being on the spectrum or

having a diagnosis, and it is important that all such things are understood by people both in this House and outside it.

**Paul Maynard:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that additional comment. He makes his point well, and does not need me to add to it further.

The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford spoke with expertise and passion. I mentioned earlier that there are areas on which there is greater agreement in this place than we might realise, and an example of such an area is the importance of early intervention and diversion work to get people off the conveyor belt to crime before they get far along it.

**Valerie Vaz:** May I just say that inadvertently I forget to mention the hon. Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) and his efforts with his local councils?

**Paul Maynard:** I thank the hon. Lady for encouraging me to do the same. We hear such points made at most business questions, so we are both very familiar with the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger) mentioned, and it is important that they are placed on the record.

To go back to the more important point made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford, we have put an additional £50 million into nurseries in the most disadvantaged areas. I have the fourth most deprived ward in the country in my constituency, and I understand the importance of making sure that young people have somewhere to go and have some structure in their lives. Those things can sometimes be provided by their families, but sometimes they may not be, and we should not underestimate the importance of youth provision. She made some important points, and I look forward to reading the outcome of her youth violence commission, which is an important piece of cross-party work.

I am almost tempted to communicate psychically with the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney) and just stare at him to give him my response to his comments—but perhaps not; I can verbalise it if I try. We can tell that he has not been here long because he paid tribute to the Whips. If he attends future periodic Adjournment debates, I do not think he will be doing that quite so often. However, if nothing else, it is nice to know that at least one Labour Member was grateful to be staying late last night.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Forgive me, but as a former Whip, may I ask whether it is right for the Minister to denigrate the generality of Whips to new Members in the Chamber?

**Mr Speaker:** All I would say is that if the Minister had not done so, I would probably have done it for him.

**Paul Maynard:** I think it is fair to say that, not having been a Whip for very long, I am still learning how to exercise the full panoply of my powers.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East made a number of very worthwhile points, and I am sure he will participate in the debates that he identified after the Easter recess.

**Mr Sweeney:** I thank the Deputy Leader of the House, if that is his official title, for giving way. I want to press him on the issue of GKN, because it has just been announced that it will be subject to a takeover by Melrose. In the light of that development, does the Minister agree that this urgent issue needs to be debated in this House before the takeover progresses any further?

**Paul Maynard:** That point is certainly well made. I was not aware of that announcement, because I have been in the Chamber for a while, but I will make sure that we raise it with the relevant Department and get him a response. When we come back after Easter, I am sure that that will be a matter for discussion in the House in some way, shape or form.

To go back to Inverness, I will have to pay a visit, if only to hunt for Nessie, about which I have been inspired by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham.

**Bob Stewart:** For the sake of clarity, my uncle, Gregor Bartlett, was at prep school alongside Loch Ness in 1931. He was late back to school, and he and another boy claimed that they were watching the Loch Ness monster. This grew big—*The Scotsman*, lots of pictures, and he was stuck with it. Only at my great uncle's funeral was he allowed to declare that actually he had not seen the Loch Ness monster all those years ago as a boy. But I say to the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry): I believe there is a Loch Ness monster!

**Paul Maynard:** The shocks from my hon. Friend never cease. I had assumed that he would be visiting the many distilleries in the constituency of the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), rather than the Loch Ness monster. People say that, as Catholics, we should try to give up what we most value during Lent. I always try to give up politics, but I fail hopelessly after about a day.

**Chris Stephens:** May I suggest that next year the hon. Gentleman might want to give up Conservatism?

**Paul Maynard:** There are some things that, even for the holy mother Church, go beyond what I could possibly dream of achieving. I always think that we learn a lot from early-day motions. They may cost a lot per early-day motion, but none the less I was delighted to hear about the centenary of Catholic education in Scotland. As someone who survived the Christian Brothers during my school days, I know that they have a formative influence on all our lives. I also welcome many of the other examples of good community projects that the hon. Gentleman raised in those early-day motions.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, and your Deputies, the Clerks, the Doorkeepers and all the staff—indeed, everyone who does anything in this place—for all that they do. It is right that we thank them not just today but every time that we encounter them. Without their ceaseless good will, our lives would be much more complicated, and perhaps our labours less effective.

We are coming up to the centenary of the foundation of the RAF, but there will be another anniversary while we are not here over Easter, because it is the 40th anniversary of radio broadcasts in the House of Commons. Some might think that I am making a great

[Paul Maynard]

play to appear on “Yesterday in Parliament”, but such ambition could not be further from my mind. Who knows? I might feature on it—we just don’t know. However, it is worth remembering that 40 years ago we started being broadcast, and what was said in this place was made available to the outside world in more than just textual form.

We might be emerging into a late spring after a somewhat harsh winter, but just as in nature, so in our constituency activities. I hope we will return to our constituencies full of vim and vigour, and seeking the greater fulfilment and excitement that we get from all the constituency visits on which we will now depart. I wish everybody here a happy and joyous Eastertide.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment.

## Point of Order

4.58 pm

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. A number of written statements are published in today’s Order Paper, and I understand that for the convenience of Members, such statements are normally published at the start of the day, or at least as close to the start of the day as possible. My office has been chasing the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the promised update on social housing, but I understand that it was eventually published at around 4 o’clock this afternoon. That does not seem to be good for the convenience of Members.

**Mr Speaker:** Yes, it is profoundly inconvenient. The short answer to the hon. Gentleman is that there is no prescribed time, but it is commonplace, and has come to be expected by Members, that such statements should be issued much earlier in the day. For such a statement to be issued so late in the day is regrettable, and arguably discourteous to the House; for it to be issued so late in the day on the last day of term, and when the House will not sit again for more than a fortnight is, shall we say, doubly unfortunate.

There are three Whips on the Treasury Bench. On the assumption that they will want to make themselves useful in some way or another—I feel sure that they will—they will doubtless relay this matter to a higher authority and the recurrence of this phenomenon will be averted. [Interruption.] Two of them have told me from a sedentary position that they agree. I look in the direction of the third. A simple nod of the head will suffice. [Interruption.] All five Government Members on the Treasury Front Bench agree. Unanimity has broken out on the Treasury Bench! Well, the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) has greater power than he knows.

On that happy note, I thank the hon. Gentleman not just for his point of order but for all he does on a regular basis, including, I may say, deputising for the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, which he has done extremely conscientiously. I think that that is appreciated in all parts of the House.

## Business without Debate

### ELECTORAL COMMISSION

[Relevant document: *The Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, First Report 2018, Appointment of an Electoral Commissioner, HC 901.*]

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Order, 20 March, and Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Sarah Chambers as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 31 March 2018 for the period ending 30 March 2022.—(Mims Davies.)

*Question agreed to.*

### PETITIONS

#### Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Inveraray

5 pm

**Brendan O’Hara** (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): It borders on unbelievable that Inveraray, a town with a booming tourist industry, a town with three good-sized hotels, a town boasting numerous cafes, bars and restaurants, and various high-quality clothing outlets, a town that

has an estate and a hugely popular castle, could be left without a single bank. Yet that is exactly what the Royal Bank of Scotland plans to do, without any prior consultation with the people of Inveraray.

This is the thanks the people of Inveraray get for, along with taxpayers across the United Kingdom, bailing out the Royal Bank to the tune of almost £50 billion. Just before Christmas, I launched a petition in the town opposing the branch closure, and I am delighted that that petition, which I present to the House today, has gathered hundreds of signatures.

**Mr Speaker:** It has indeed, and that is in itself a highly impressive feat, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman, in presenting his petition, will not accidentally elide into the delivery of a speech, which is not apposite on these occasions.

**Brendan O'Hara:** Moving on swiftly, Mr Speaker.

The petition states:

The Petition of residents of Argyll & Bute,

Declares that the proposed closure of the Inveraray branch of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland will have a detrimental effect on local community and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever steps they can to halt the planned closure of this branch.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002130]

**Royal Bank of Scotland closure in Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey**

5.3 pm

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the people and the businesses of Grantown-on-Spey, who flocked to public meetings and found the decision of the Royal Bank of Scotland to be simply a betrayal of their community.

The Petition states:

The petition of residents of Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch & Strathspey,

Declares that the proposed closure of the branches of the publicly-owned Royal Bank of Scotland in the areas of Nairn, Grantown, Aviemore and Inverness will have a detrimental effect on local communities and the local economy.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges Her Majesty's Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Royal Bank of Scotland to take into account the concerns of petitioners and take whatever step they can to halt the planned closure of the branches.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002131]

## Air Quality and Shore-to-Ship Charging

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Mims Davies.*)

5.4 pm

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): It is a sad occasion that I cannot entirely join in the good wishes of the Deputy Leader of the House for the Easter Adjournment, because I am still here, along with you, Mr Speaker, and indeed a number of hon. Friends and hon. Members who have come to hear this debate and possibly to intervene briefly. I am very appreciative of their taking the time to stay behind, and indeed, of the Minister for coming along this afternoon to hear the last Adjournment debate before we finally start our Easter recess.

The city that I represent is home to one of the UK's largest ports. Southampton's thriving port hosts large numbers of container vessels, roll-on/roll-off ships transporting vehicles, and many general cargo ships, along with being the main UK base for cruise ships. In just the next five days in Southampton, more than 60 large vessels are due to arrive at the port, including five cruise ships, nine large vehicle/ro-ro vessels and 10 large container ships. They are all very welcome to the port. Southampton port is not just a great asset to Southampton, but is a national trading and passenger asset in its own right.

The ships are varied in size, content and function, but they all have one thing in common: when they are in port, often for several days at a time, they keep themselves going—their heating, lighting, power and so on—by running their engines and on-board generators as if they were at sea. During that period, a cruise liner, particularly, will consume an enormous amount of fuel—estimated to be some 2,500 litres of diesel per hour—in running its generators and keeping facilities in good order for perhaps 3,000 or 4,000 passengers. If we take account of the crew members and all the other people who are on the vessel, a cruise liner in port in the middle of Southampton running its engines in this way might be likened to a small town, perhaps the size of Romsey, turning up in the middle of a city and running exclusively on diesel generators, with all the consequences that that has for nitrous oxide and particulate emissions across the area.

At the same time, Southampton is one of 18 cities in the UK facing possible infraction proceedings because of air quality issues in the city. Measures are under way in Southampton on the basis of commendable action by the city council to get a grip on air quality, including a future clean air zone for the city centre. The port of Southampton is working hard on its shoreside emissions. The port overall can be extrapolated as contributing overall perhaps some 25% of total emissions—of nitrous oxide, sulphur and particulates—but to date, it has not been able to do anything about the central fact of ships berthed in the port.

However, something can be done and indeed is being done in a number of ports across the world—that is, to plug vessels arriving in port into the port's mains electricity system, so that a ship can switch off its engines and rely on shore power to do the job. Ports in a number of parts of the world, including the United States, the far east and some parts of Europe, have installed shore-to-ship

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

electrical supplies—essentially a very large plug deriving electrical supply from local power that goes into an equally large socket on the ship at berth to take over the running of the ship's power in port.

Shore-to-ship power is a very simple and relatively low-cost alternative to ships powering themselves when in ports close to densely populated areas. It also, potentially, makes money for ships at berth, since it is far cheaper for them to run on local power than to burn bunker fuel while in port. It certainly saves on emissions: a recent study in the United States showed that cruise vessels using shore power in one location saved 99% of their nitrous oxide emissions and between 60% and 70% of particulate emissions. Increasing numbers of vessels visiting ports in the UK now have the equipment on board that allows them to plug in. The problem is, though, that there are no shore facilities installed in Southampton, or indeed in any medium or large commercial port anywhere in the UK.

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a very strong case for the argument he outlines. Does he believe that the absence of the shore-to-ship power supply is caused by a lack of regulation? Will he come on to what the shipping companies are expected to be able to do in terms of plugging in? Is it the responsibility of the port? Have the Government legislated on what ought to be the best practice in ports?

**Dr Whitehead:** My hon. Friend has raised some important points, and I shall touch on some of them in a moment. There are currently no regulations that would mandate the introduction of shore-to-ship power, although it is possible that European Union directives could be used for the purpose.

To the credit of Southampton port, it is looking into whether it can install facilities in one cruise liner berth, but, as far as I know, it is alone in that. No other major port in the United Kingdom is following suit. The arguments that are presented for doing nothing about it are multiple and familiar. It is argued that not enough ships have the facilities to “plug in”, so it would be a waste of money, or that it is too expensive to take the plunge unilaterally, or that there are other ways in which emissions from ships might be reduced.

**Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case. As he will know, my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and I have concerns about the Enderby Wharf cruise liner terminal that is planned for East Greenwich. In that instance, the developer is saying that the cruise liner company with which it is working does not have the necessary technology. Is there not a role for the Government here? Could they not regulate to encourage cruise liner companies to upgrade and retrofit their fleets so that they can utilise this option when ports and terminals take it up?

**Dr Whitehead:** There is certainly a case for doing that. In California, regulations require a certain proportion of ships visiting ports to use shore-to-ship facilities. However, in California the facilities are already there.

The arguments for doing nothing have some limited grounds, but unless the facilities are there, ships will have no incentive to equip themselves to use them, and,

as I have said, there is currently no mandate for their use. Equipping a berth for large vessels would cost about £3 million, and fully equipping all Britain's major and medium-sized ports would probably come to about £100 million.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Before I came to this place, I was a deputy executive member on Leeds City Council, and I attended many workshops with Southampton city councillors where I heard those same arguments. It was said that Southampton and other city councils were too hard pressed to introduce such measures. Does my hon. Friend agree that they are doing all that they can, but need Government support?

**Dr Whitehead:** I do agree, and in a moment I shall refer to the support that the Government might be able to provide. If we are to roll out shore-to-ship power across the country, we shall need a combination of stick and carrot.

The £100 million that I have just mentioned would, however, largely be recovered—eventually—in fees in subsequent years, because ships coming into port would be charged for the electricity that they used, although it would be cheaper for them than using their own bunker fuel. It is true that some companies are making an effort to modify the fuel that is used by generators when ships are in port so that they run on, say, liquid petroleum gas rather than diesel or bunker fuel, but nothing comes close to the benefit of shore-to-ship supply.

So how can we make a break in the apparent stand-off that currently exists in the UK? Ports may be aware that shore-to-ship power is beginning to happen seriously around the world, and ships are increasingly turning up ready to go, but everyone is looking over their shoulder to see whether anyone else is moving first. It might, commendably, be Southampton—although even then the initiative is for only one berth, which is a start but leaves a long way to go—but Southampton should not be in such a position.

My central call this afternoon is for Government to take the lead in the creation of a level playing field for all ports in the UK for shore-to-ship installations by giving notice of an intention to mandate their use in ports by a specified date and, if I can venture a suggestion, to place aside a modest fund to assist ports in installing the necessary equipment over the specified implementation period.

That is not exactly a novel idea, because an EU directive already exists—directive 2014/94/EU, to be precise, known as the alternative fuels infrastructure directive or AFID. It says this on shore-to-ship power, in article 4(5):

“Member States shall ensure that the need for shore-side electricity supply for inland waterway...and seagoing ships in maritime and inland ports is assessed in their national policy frameworks. Such shore-side electricity supply shall be installed as a priority in ports of the TEN-T Core Network, and in other ports, by 31 December 2025”.

Article 4(6) states:

“Member States shall ensure that shore-side electricity supply installations for maritime transport, deployed or renewed as from 18 November 2017, comply with the technical specifications set out in point 1.7 of Annex II.”

The Government have consulted and responded to the consultation on the directive, except that in the consultation they have scrupulously put the implementation of article 4(6) into train by insisting that statutory operators

“must ensure that new or renewed shore side supply installations must comply with certain technical standards”.

Frankly, I imagine that that will be fairly easy to comply with given that none exist. Of course, there is not a mention in the consultation or response of the rather more difficult point made in article 4(5).

In other words, as far as I can see, the Department does not intend to do anything about that. So my other call this afternoon—or rather perhaps a question—is about why the Department has apparently ignored one of the central points of the alternative fuels directive. Does it intend to put that right and get on with a programme of installing shore-to-ship charging before we are no longer mandated to do so at the end of the transition period of leaving the EU? Or does it just intend that such a mandate might just slip away and get lost after our exit from the EU is complete? If the latter is the case, that will be a sad outcome both for Southampton and all the populations of the ports around the country who welcome and support the port activity in their towns and cities but want those ports to be contributors to the health and clean air of their cities rather than detractors.

I hope that the Minister has a positive response for me this afternoon so that I can wish her, as well as everybody else, a happy Easter.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I sensed that my hon. Friend was heading to a conclusion. At the beginning of his speech, he said how important the port of Southampton is for the wellbeing of the city, so will he confirm that this is not an attack on shipping, which is a fundamental industry for the UK economy? Members want to support shipping and are asking the Government for leadership in ensuring that shipping is more environmentally friendly and clean in the future. That will mean that when new cruise terminals are proposed for places such as the centre of London, people will welcome that because of the economic benefit it will bring and because they know that it will operate on an environmentally clean basis.

**Dr Whitehead:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I want to emphasise a little more. The presence of the port and all the activity that goes on with it are wholly welcomed in Southampton. I am sure that that is exactly the same in other cities that are close to and host major ports in the UK. Those cities do not want to see the end of those ports; indeed, they want to see development and thriving arrangements. All the boroughs around those cities have a joint interest in ensuring that the ports thrive as best they can. Over the years, Southampton has been substantially supportive of the growth and development of the port, but we want ports to work on the same basis as everyone else, cleaning up the air around us and ensuring that we can live in an environment that is conducive to the thriving of those ports for the future.

Hoping that the Minister has a positive response for me this afternoon, I will end with the thought that that response will literally enable my constituents to breathe more easily.

5.19 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) on securing this important debate on shipping emissions and, in particular, on shore-to-ship charging. I agree that our maritime ports should continue to thrive, and we are all here to

ensure that that happens. I had the privilege of visiting Southampton during the first few weeks in my new role as maritime Minister, and since then I have met a number of shipping stakeholders that operate out of the port. I know the port's importance to the city and the local economy, as it provides up to 15,000 jobs in the Solent region and thousands more across the UK. I believe that it is also the world's busiest port.

I also know the importance of air quality to the city, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that issue today. We know the harmful effects that poor air quality can have on human health, the economy and the environment. It shortens lives and reduces quality of life, especially for the most vulnerable. Reducing air pollution to protect the environment and public health is unquestionably a priority for the Government. The UK has signed up to ambitious, legally binding targets to reduce emissions of the five most damaging air pollutants by 2020 and 2030, aiming to cut early deaths from poor air quality by half.

The debate has focused on shipping emissions. To date, the UK's main priority in tackling ship emissions has been at the international level. We have played, and continue to play, a leading role in negotiating international limits for pollutant emissions from shipping. The UK has consistently pressed for the most stringent controls in those high-risk areas. UK ports such as the port of Southampton have been the beneficiaries of that action. Being within the North sea emissions control area means that the city and residents of Southampton benefit from some of the most stringent international controls on shipping emissions in its surrounding waters. Since January 2015, all vessels operating in that area must use either 0.1% sulphur fuel or a compliant alternative, and from 2021, all new ships operating in this area will need to meet the most stringent NO<sub>x</sub> emissions standards, which we expect to reduce NO<sub>x</sub> emissions from ships by around 75%.

Those international controls are having a major positive impact on air quality, but I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to go as far as we can on this. The controls have been successful in achieving major emissions reductions, and in stimulating the development and uptake of alternative fuels, innovative green technologies and new ship designs. That said, we are not complacent and we know that much more needs to be done and can be done. At the international level, the UK is strongly pushing for an ambitious and credible strategy to reduce greenhouse gases from shipping, and I invite the hon. Gentleman to support the UK's efforts to get a strong and forward-thinking agreement at the International Maritime Organisation as we enter the final weeks of negotiations after Easter. Furthermore, we will continue to press for international action that will enable the uptake of low and zero-emission technologies. However, we also want to ensure that we are doing all we can to reduce emissions in UK waters.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is developing a clean air strategy that will look at actions to reduce pollutant emissions across the board from manufacturing to farming, and from generating energy to transport. This will be published for consultation shortly, so all stakeholders will have the chance to contribute on this important issue. My Department has been working closely with DEFRA and the maritime sector to develop proposals within the strategy to further reduce shipping emissions.

[Ms Nusrat Ghani]

I hear the hon. Gentleman's concerns about Southampton and recognise that the city faces a serious challenge to improve its poor air quality. In the 2015 air quality plan, Southampton was named as one of the five initial cities that were expected to produce local plans to achieve compliance with nitrogen dioxide limits by 15 September 2018. In July 2017, the Government announced £255 million for local councils to accelerate their air quality plans as part of a £3.5 billion commitment on air quality and cleaner transport. The Government are supporting Southampton City Council to conduct its feasibility study and to implement measures to deliver compliance in the shortest possible time. I also know that Southampton port is actively developing ways of reducing emissions across the port, and that it is considering shoreside power as an option to deliver air quality improvements.

We must recognise, however, that reducing shipping emissions is a complex issue, and experts concur that there is no silver bullet. Shoreside electricity is one of a number of solutions. Some of them are very well established, such as using liquefied natural gas, scrubbers and NOx catalysts. Others are still being trialled and applied on a small scale, such as hydrogen, electric batteries and hybrid solutions. We are, for example, seeing an ever-increasing number of ships that are capable of using LNG. The choice of which technology to deploy and invest in will primarily lie with shipowners and ship operators, but ports also have a role to play. Ships often rely on ports to provide access to alternative fuels, but ports will equally rely on ships installing technologies to ensure that the provision of such fuels is commercially viable.

I am aware that ports across the world are beginning to make provision for cleaner, alternative fuels. Some have chosen to introduce shoreside power, and there are many examples of good practice across the UK. A number of ports offer LNG bunkering, such as Teesport, Immingham and Southampton, and others are exploring the use of hydrogen, such as Orkney. The Port of London Authority has published an air quality strategy with the objective of addressing air quality on the tidal Thames and has introduced measures such as a discount on fees for greener ships calling at the port.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned infrastructure. Our national policy statement for ports requires new port developments, especially nationally significant infrastructure projects, to consider the provision of alternative fuels as part of the planning process. In particular, they are required to make reasonable advance provision for shoreside electricity, or to explain why that would not be economically and environmentally worth while.

We must recognise, however, that the business model for UK ports is different from that in many other countries. UK ports are private entities and decisions about operations or infrastructure are a commercial matter for each port to decide. We know that ports such as Southampton will decide the best solution for them based on the needs of their customers and their stakeholders.

I mentioned before that my Department was developing a maritime air quality strategy to feed into the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' clean air

strategy. My officials are engaging with stakeholders to understand the best approach to reduce emissions, and we are working with industry, academia, trade bodies, ports and other Departments to ensure that any strategy is credible and time-proof. As part of that, we are clear that we need a strong evidence base about the impact of shipping on the environment to inform decisions about the best solutions to reduce pollutant emissions from ships, and we need to ensure that any solutions to reduce pollutant emissions are not dealt with in isolation, but support the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We consider that a holistic strategy is the best way to enable the long-term goal of zero-emission shipping in the UK.

Such an ambition provides real opportunities for UK industry in the development of green technologies and fuels. The UK is home to a wealth of expertise in maritime technology, and we want to exploit the technical and innovative excellence of our sector to lead such a change. The Government want to continue to encourage innovative ideas to help to create a more sustainable maritime sector. Last December, the transport technology research innovation grant—T-TRIG—competition offered funding for targeted calls for projects addressing maritime air quality issues. We received 14 applications and have selected five projects, two of which I believe are in Southampton and Leeds—the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) made an intervention earlier. These will receive grants of around £50,000 each to help to take their early-stage innovations to the next stage of development.

My officials are actively working with the maritime sector to develop an industrial strategy sector deal that has innovation at its core, and we are supporting the development of an industrial strategy challenge fund bid that is based around smarter and cleaner ships. Southampton is a great city to live and work in, with a fine maritime tradition. By virtue of being inside the emission control area, the people of Southampton already benefit from the strictest international controls on ship emissions currently available in Europe. SOx emissions from ships have reduced dramatically since the introduction of the emissions control area and, as I indicated, further benefits that will come from the introduction of the lower NOx limit, which comes into force in 2021.

More change needs to happen and collaboration is paramount. It is about commitment across the sector: shipping companies, ports, shipbuilders—everybody has a role to play in improving air quality. I can assure the hon. Member for Southampton, Test that the Government are committed to addressing the issue of air quality in the UK. My Department is committed to reducing emissions from transport and I am committed to ensuring that the maritime sector plays its part in that.

As this is the final debate before Easter, may I wish everyone who works in the House—this mother of all Parliaments—a very happy Easter? And if I may be indulged, Mr Speaker, may I especially wish my daughter, Farah, a very happy Easter indeed?

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 29 March 2018

[MS KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

## Leaving the EU: Justice System

1.30 pm

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Ninth Report of the Justice Committee, Session 2016-17, implications of Brexit for the justice system, HC 750, and the Government response, HC 651.

It is a pleasure, Ms Buck, to serve under your chairmanship.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this very important issue here in Westminster Hall, and I thank all members of the Select Committee on Justice—both past and present, and many of them are here today—for the input that they made to our report, which of course was initially produced in the 2016-17 Session.

We received the Government response to our report on 1 December last year. I am glad to see the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), in her place today. She has joined the Department since that date, so if I press a little harder on some things than on others, I am sure she will understand that they are not meant in any personal spirit. I think she also understands, from her own experience at the Bar, why there is a great need for more precision and more detail about what is going to happen.

I can perhaps encapsulate the Committee's concerns following the Government's response to our report by saying that the response is long on good intentions and on setting out an ambitious vision, but short on specifics and the details of how that ambitious vision will be achieved, and there is a concern that it may not be realistically achievable. The European Parliament's response earlier this month indicates that it is by no means persuaded that all of the Government's ambitious ideas for taking this matter forward will be achievable. We need what the Government have set out to be written—or rather painted—in the boldest red ink.

I suspect, given the tenor of the Prime Minister's Mansion House speech and subsequent events, that we will be pragmatic about some of these issues—indeed, both sides will need to be pragmatic. Because the law depends above all upon certainty, we will have to come to decisions and pragmatic compromises sooner rather than later. My objective in today's debate is to press the Government further on the need to be more precise and specific about exactly how we will deal with these matters, and also, perhaps, to inject a sense of urgency.

Of course, I ought to refer to my entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, although I do not practice law now. There is concern about the economic position of the English legal services sector post-Brexit. We had a debate about that yesterday in Westminster Hall, and I am grateful to the Minister for her response then. I am sure that we will want to discuss that matter further. I will not dwell on it in detail now, but it

indicates how we need to be alert and on our guard if we wish to continue to protect the pre-eminence of our English legal system. It certainly enjoys international pre-eminence at the moment—it is the jurisdiction of choice for international commercial litigation and, of course, is regarded as a gold standard in independence, fairness and integrity. As I say, we have to be on our guard in case, post Brexit, other jurisdictions seek to compete with us—legitimately enough, from their point of view—because international commercial litigation, and particularly the variety of international contracts, is a competitive matter.

I notice that there is now an English language and English commercial law court being opened up in Paris. I must say that those of us who have practised in some of the Crown courts on the south-eastern circuit might have found the idea of a brief to go to Paris quite an attractive proposition by comparison to going, say, to Havering magistrates court. However, this is not an entirely jokey matter, because, as was indicated in the debate yesterday—I will not repeat all of my remarks from then—the English legal services sector is a very significant revenue earner for this country. I should say the British legal services sector, of course, as we should not forget Scotland in this regard. But there is a much broader issue here as well, which is encompassed in our report. A number of my hon. Friends want to talk about some of the specific matters in our report, so I will perhaps sketch over some of the broad outlines.

I have indicated our firm view that we need more detail, more precision and a greater sense of urgency. We must have assurance from the Government that legal issues are being entirely mainstreamed into the work of the Brexit negotiations. The Ministry of Justice has helpfully set up a legal services working group, but this is not just about legal services; it is also about the impact upon the judiciary and the operation of the courts, which, ultimately, are perhaps even more significant.

I know that the senior judiciary are extremely alive to this issue and are doing a lot of work on it themselves. However, I submit that, consistent with maintaining the judiciary's independence, we need to find a means whereby the judiciary's practical views and experience are genuinely fed in to those who are negotiating, for example, on our future relationship with the European Court of Justice and on how we deal with retained law, which I will come back to in a moment. I have to say that I am not yet convinced, whatever the good intentions and hard work of the Ministry of Justice, that that is fully feeding in to those who are negotiating for us through the Department for Exiting the European Union and in Brussels. The Government need to address that urgently. It seems to the Committee that we need clarity on those key issues of the position vis-à-vis the ECJ and retained law. There is still real concern about the effectiveness and adequacy of the provisions in clause 6 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill.

It is instructive, perhaps, to look at the evidence of the President of the Supreme Court, Baroness Hale of Richmond, given on 21 March, which is only about a week or so ago, to the Constitution Committee of the other place. In essence, the position is that at the moment, clause 6 gives what on the face of it would appear to be wide discretion in how the British courts will apply and have regard to European Community law once we have left. There is a perfectly understandable precedent, of

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course—it is perfectly well established that British courts will take into account relevant law from other jurisdictions when it is applicable to the facts and law of the case that they are considering.

However, there is a difficulty. There are phrases in the Bill stating, for example, that a tribunal “may have regard” to European Community law—there are those terms, “may” and “have regard”—but then there is a get-out clause stating that it

“need not have regard to anything done on or after exit day by the European Court, another EU entity or the EU but may do so if it considers it appropriate to do so.”

The President of the Supreme Court said that she found that drafting “very unhelpful”. If the President of the Supreme Court says that, the Government ought to sit up, take notice and do something about it.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a really powerful point. Is not the issue here that judges do not want to be dragged into the political arena? Although courts have shown themselves well able to look at other jurisdictions for a potential steer on how to interpret things, when it comes to the EU the process is so overlaid with politics that judges could find themselves accused of becoming, in the phrase that we have heard, “enemies of the people”. We should not be in that field, and judges deserve the protection of knowing exactly what they are required to interpret.

**Robert Neill:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and the importance of that point cannot be overstated. I am absolutely confident that the Minister gets that point entirely, because we saw utterly disgraceful attacks by some of the press upon the judiciary for carrying out their constitutional task. Those words should never have been said, and I am glad to say that the current Justice Secretary and Lord Chancellor has made very clear his support for the independence of the judiciary and the respect with which that independence should be treated. I know that the Minister entirely shares that view.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) is quite right. Broad wording on such a political topic lays the judges open to such things, because if they are obliged to act according to the clause that I mentioned—as they will be if it is passed in its current form—they will inevitably run the real risk of being accused of having taken, in effect, political decisions. That is why the President of the Supreme Court spoke in the way she did. She said:

“We don’t think ‘appropriate’ is the right sort of word to address to judges. We don’t do things because they are appropriate, we look at things because they are relevant and helpful. We do not want to be put in the position of appearing to make a political decision about what is and is not appropriate.”

That is exactly the point that my hon. Friend made so powerfully.

I know the clause is being debated in the other place, but as it stands it just does not give judges the protection to which they are legitimately entitled. I hope the Government will address that as a matter of urgency. That is not only the view of the current President of the Supreme Court; it has been echoed by her predecessor, Lord Neuberger, and by the previous Lord Chief Justice,

Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd. That is overwhelming and compelling evidence that there has to be movement on this point. It is time for the Government to do that. I suspect they would find good will across the House if they could find a means of properly addressing those concerns of the judiciary—one has to stress that those are their concerns.

The Attorney General said it was not the Government’s desire to put judges in that position. I entirely accept his good faith in that. He said:

“We will continue to work with them to provide the necessary clarity.”—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2018; Vol. 638, c. 389.]

That is good, but it has to be translated into legislation that is fit for purpose. We are not at that stage yet, and we need much more clarity. I hope that the Minister will be able to deal with that point and take it back to the Attorney General and those dealing with the Bill.

The issue of how we deal with the ECJ is important, but we also need to be realistic. If we want to continue some of the partnership arrangements we have, there will have to be dispute resolution processes. All the agreements will need an arbitral mechanism. I hope the Government will take on board the strong views of legal practitioners across the country that a desire to displace any role for the ECJ—as opposed to removing “direct jurisdiction”, to use the Prime Minister’s phrase, which is a different concept—may create more difficulties than is worthwhile. There are perhaps some limited areas, such as the interpretation of specific matters of financial services regulation and some matters of data regulation, where there might be sense in making a pragmatic compromise rather than having to set up a number of ad hoc arbitral mechanisms such as tribunals or whatever we might call them. That is a key and pressing issue.

There are other issues that concern the Committee on how we will deal with criminal justice and judicial co-operation. They have already been addressed at some length, and I know other colleagues will deal with them today. The point I stress is that the Prime Minister has already indicated her firm and resolute intention to have an ongoing agreement so that we can share in police and judicial co-operation and security co-operation. She is absolutely right to do that, and I support her in doing so, but we have to be realistic. If we are to benefit from such things as the European criminal records information exchange system, the work of Europol and the information exchange that is so critical to the pursuit of modern crime—whether that is terrorism or organised crime of other kinds—we have to have our data arrangements aligned. That must inevitably mean following the EU27’s data regulation and any jurisprudence that subsequently develops that touches on that. Otherwise, with the best will in the world, the police and security agencies in those EU27 countries, which include some of our most vital partners, will not be able to share information with us lawfully. We do not yet have clarity over how that will be dealt with, and we must have that swiftly.

There is also the issue of civil and family justice co-operation. I mentioned the importance of the civil sector, but we have to ensure that we have a firm arrangement for the mutual recognition and enforcement of judgments. That is certainly important for the commercial litigation sector, but it applies to all contractual arrangements. If someone has a contract, they want to

be able to sue if it is breached. There needs to be a remedy that can realistically be enforced. We must have more clarity on that. As I have observed on more than one occasion, there are literally thousands of UK citizens—as it happens, most of them are mothers—who benefit from the ability to have maintenance payments enforced against former partners now living in other EU jurisdiction countries. It is unconscionable that those people, working hard under difficult circumstances, would lose the ability to have those payments enforced by a simple blanket mechanism. Warm words are not enough. That needs to be sorted out before we finally leave, whether that is in transition or the end state.

I hope that is a sufficient overview of some of our areas of concern and why we are pressing the Government on them. I look forward to the Minister's response and the other contributions from colleagues on some of the other specific areas of this important debate, which I have no doubt the Justice Committee will return to in the coming weeks and months.

1.45 pm

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I welcome the Minister to her role in the Ministry of Justice. I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill)—as a member of the Justice Committee, he is my hon. Friend—and his introduction to the work we have undertaken. I want to focus on a couple of the issues we have raised in the Justice Committee report and some of the issues with the Government's response.

We set out four principal aims in the report that should be central to the Government's approach to justice post-Brexit: continuing to co-operate as closely as possible on criminal justice; maintaining access to the EU's valuable regulations on inter-state commercial law; enabling cross-border legal practice rights and opportunities; and retaining efficient mechanisms to resolve family law cases, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

If I may, I will focus on criminal legislation and criminal law. In our summary to the report, we said:

“Crime is ever more international.”

Self-evidently, crime does not respect borders. The EU mechanisms to combat illegal activities across borders include many EU institutions. For example, through the European arrest warrant, we have facilities to extradite and bring back to this country people who have committed or are suspected of having committed serious offences. We have investigative resources through the European agencies—Europol and Eurojust—that support police, prosecutors and judges. We also have information-sharing tools that give rapid access to suspects' criminal records and biometric information. All those things are extremely important in ensuring that our constituents have justice and that we have the opportunity to deport people who have committed serious offences in this country to face justice back in their home jurisdictions in Europe.

We put those agenda items on the table, and the Government responded in December, before the Minister came to her post. I want to quote a couple of the Government's comments and test them with the Minister a little bit more. In the first appendix to the report, they said:

“For criminal matters, we want to continue to cooperate across a range of tools, measures and agencies and continue the facilitation of operational business across borders. We believe that the UK and the EU should work together to design new, dynamic arrangements as part of our future partnership that would allow us to continue and strengthen our close collaboration on criminal justice.”

That is all well and good—it is a great aspiration—but my questions to the Minister are: how, when and what progress? We are 365 days from when we potentially leave.

The Government response went further:

“The UK will therefore be approaching negotiations on the future partnership with the EU as an opportunity to build on what we have already achieved through decades of collaboration, integrated working, and joint systems and procedures...the UK is unconditionally committed to maintaining Europe's security.”

That is all well and good—nobody would disagree with that—but my questions to the Minister are: how, when and what progress?

The Government response gets more worrying. They said they acknowledge that

“when we leave the EU, the legal framework that currently underpins cooperation between the UK and the EU on security, law enforcement and criminal justice will no longer apply to the UK. As part of a deep and special partnership, it will be in our mutual interest to agree new arrangements that enable us to sustain cooperation across a wide range of these structures and measures, reflecting the importance of preserving the extensive collaboration that currently exists between the UK and the EU.”

I ask the Minister: where are we on agreeing those new arrangements? What discussions have there been? When will they publish their view? Does the EU have a timescale to agree the new arrangements? Will they be agreed before the deal in September or October or November is put to the House? Will they be agreed 367 days from today, after we have left the European Union? Those things matter.

Other members of the Committee will comment on the European arrest warrant in due course, but in 2016, 13,797 requests came to the UK from European partners for arrest warrants. UK police forces made 1,843 arrests in respect to those warrants. Many of those arrest warrants were put out across all countries because the host nation did not know where the criminal suspect was, but UK forces made 1,843 arrests, and we surrendered 1,431 suspects. We requested of our European partners 349 arrest warrants in 2016, of which 185 resulted in arrests, and 156 suspects were surrendered to the United Kingdom.

From 2010 to 2016, which I have figures for, 1,773 warrants were requested and 1,101 arrests were made. I expect that co-operation in the future, and I know that the Minister would seek it, but as of today, I do not know the road map to achieve it, and the Minister has a duty to tell us what it is. In my area in Wales, we surrendered 151 suspects, and 25 people were arrested and sent in the other direction. Such people are warranted because they will potentially be charged with serious crimes such as child sexual abuse, terrorism, or serious organised crime.

I am old enough to remember the Costa del Crime in Spain. People scarpered to Spain when they committed offences in this country and lived a life of luxury, because we did not have those arrangements. That does not happen now. I have seen police in Spain knock on doors in villas in Marbella and bring people back to

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this country. I ask the Minister: what will happen on that, when, how, where, and when will this House know? The London bombers, for example—I know you will be interested in this, Ms Buck—were brought back under an arrest warrant to this country, and are now in prison in the United Kingdom serving a very long sentence because of that European co-operation. Let us have some information about how we are going to progress that.

I take a great interest in Europol. We cannot get away from the fact that, as it says on Europol's website today, Europol

“is democratically managed on the basis of a system of controls, checks and supervision of governance”

but is governed by

“EU justice and interior ministers, MEPs”

and “other EU bodies”. I ask the Minister: when we wake up, 366 days from today, on 1 or 2 April 2019, what will our relationship be with Eurojust under the new regime in the transition period? How will Ministers influence Eurojust and Europol?

Those are key issues, because we are part of 44 crime workstreams in Europol: economic crime, excise fraud, money laundering, trafficking in human beings, facilitation of illegal immigration, drug trafficking, synthetic drugs, cannabis, cocaine and heroin, other drugs, terrorism, organised property crime, illicit firearms trafficking, intellectual property crime, counterfeiting and product privacy, cybercrime, high-tech crimes, social engineering, child sexual exploitation, online sexual coercion, forgery of money, payment fraud, euro counterfeiting, money mulling, corruption, sports corruption, environmental crime, illicit trafficking in endangered animal species, illicit trafficking in endangered plant species, maritime piracy, stolen vehicles, illicit tobacco trade, outlaw motorcycle gangs, mobile organised crime groups, mafia-structured crime, forgery, illicit trafficking in cultural goods including antiquities, illicit trafficking in hormonal substances, and crime connected with nuclear and radioactive substances. Those are just some of the 44 workstreams we are part of, and over which we have governance. We have access, we share information, and operate with European partners.

This time next year, we will not be part of the European Union—we will be in transition, but we will not be part of the European community. I therefore ask the Minister again: what progress will be made, and how, where and when? I expect co-operation and a willingness to co-operate, because that is in everybody's interests, but I am not yet clear on the road map or the final decisions.

I am not clear on that because the head of Europol is not clear on it. Rob Wainwright, who is British, is currently the head of Europol—he will no longer be, very shortly, for self-evident reasons. He spoke to the House of Lords Committee the other week, and I will put a couple of his quotes on the record in this place. He said that:

“The UK will face ‘impediments’ to receiving high-quality information from the EU's law enforcement agency after Brexit”.

That is what Rob Wainwright said only the other week. He said

“it was not realistic for there to be no change to the UK's relationship with the organisation after Brexit, given that only full members of the EU currently have unrestricted access to its databases...One can assume that the [European Commission] will somehow insist on some change”.

I ask the Minister again: what change will the European Union insist on? What will happen with regard to the high-quality information we currently receive? Again, I quote for your benefit, Ms Buck, and for the benefit of *Hansard*:

“Mr Wainwright said the UK was not likely to have direct access to Europol databases.”

That is what the head of Europol said: the UK is not likely to have direct access to Europol databases on the 44 areas I skipped through, each of which has a serious crime cohort underneath. I ask the Minister: what will happen? What is happening now? What will happen before next year? Will we have access? If not, what access relationship will we have? What will our access cost us? Will that access slow down criminal activity contact between various organisations fighting crime in this country?

Finally, Mr Wainwright

“added that Britain's waning influence”—

just let it sink in for a moment that the head of Europol used the phrase “Britain's waning influence”—

“over European policing could affect the country's efforts in other areas, including modern slavery”,

which was a personal priority of the Prime Minister when she was the Home Secretary.

I believe that these matters will be solved, but it is incumbent on the Minister to give some road map on the solving of these problems. This is not a game. It is about protecting children, protecting people from modern slavery, catching criminals, stopping terrorism, ensuring that drugs do not enter this country, and helping our European partners to fight crime in their countries as well. That is in all of our interests. I know that the police and intelligence services will want to do it, but ultimately the Minister needs to tell us how.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Ms Karen Buck (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind everyone that the Front-Bench speeches will start at 2.30 pm on the dot. We can comfortably accommodate all speakers if Members restrict themselves to no more than seven or eight minutes. I call Victoria Prentis.

1.59 pm

**Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck, and to join with former and current colleagues from the Justice Committee in discussing these important matters. I will not detain hon. Members long, because I, like others, have more questions than answers.

I will focus my remarks on dispute resolution. We know that when we leave the European Union, the EU treaties will cease to apply in the UK. We also know that the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice will be strictly time-limited to end in December 2020. What is less clear is how dispute resolution will be dealt with throughout the withdrawal, implementation and post-implementation period. I know the Minister had

to face questions on this once already this week, from the EU Justice Sub-Committee, so I apologise for raising it with her again, but many of the questions will be similar to those she has already answered, and we will continue to ask those questions over the next few years until we have greater clarity on the position going forward.

When the Justice Committee undertook the inquiry, we did not have the benefit of either the future partnership paper or the draft withdrawal agreement, which have since been published. We heard from expert witnesses who indicated that the area of dispute resolution was complex and had not yet received much attention. As a consequence, what the Committee had to say on dispute resolution was very limited, because we did not have the information on which to make specific recommendations on what we would like to see in a dispute resolution mechanism. I am sure that, like me, my Committee colleagues welcome the various papers that have since been published and are grateful for the work that continues to be done on what the UK hopes to achieve in this area.

Article 160 of the draft withdrawal agreement makes it clear:

“The Union and the United Kingdom shall...make every attempt through cooperation and consultations to arrive at a mutually satisfactory resolution of any matter that might affect its operation.”

It is very hard to argue with that. Article 162 suggests the formation of a joint committee made up of representatives from the EU and the UK. My understanding is that the committee will supervise the implementation of the agreement and seek appropriate means to resolve disputes, which will not be by judicial process, but by arbitration.

We know that a joint committee is a common approach to international agreements. The future partnership paper says:

“Committees comprised of representatives from both parties are frequently established as part of free trade agreements, such as in the EEA agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement”.

That is reassuring, in so far as there must therefore be working examples to look to and learn from. I would be interested to hear from the Minister whether any work has yet been carried out to examine the success of those other joint committees.

It is also not clear to me what will happen after the implementation period finishes. I accept that we are taking this one step at a time, but I think the Committee would welcome at least some understanding of what the Government hope for beyond 2020.

2.2 pm

**Bambos Charalambous** (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. As a former solicitor, I know only too well the vital services provided by the legal profession, not only to clients in the UK but across Europe and globally. Legal services are the largest market in the EU, thanks to the strength and stability of English and Welsh law, our independent courts and judiciary and the excellence of our legal service providers.

The contribution of the legal services sector to the UK economy was worth more than £26 billion, or 1.5% of the UK's GDP, in 2017, so any impact of Brexit on

legal services would have a knock-on effect on the UK economy. The sector employs more than 380,000 people and the latest statistics suggest that the legal services sector was responsible for a net export of more than £4 billion.

At the moment, European directives mean that lawyers and law firms are able to benefit from a simple, predictable and uniform system that allows them a temporary or permanent presence in other EU member states. UK lawyers are able to service the cross-border needs of businesses and individuals from both satellite offices in the EU and London offices, and 36 out of the 50 top UK law firms have at least one office in another EU or EEA state or in Switzerland. They have a presence in 26 of those 31 countries.

As lawyers from an EU member state, UK lawyers can appear before EU courts. If we were to lose those rights, UK lawyers would not be able to advise on areas such as competition, intellectual property or trade, due to restrictions on rights of audience at certain EU institutions, such as the Court of Justice of the European Union. Those are all currently lucrative practices for UK-qualified lawyers and bring business to UK law firms. Losing such business could be economically catastrophic for firms and for the UK economy.

Without a deal, the attractiveness of UK law and lawyers for multinational business will decrease, which will lead to an increase in costs for transactions involving UK lawyers and law firms. Even though the UK will remain an open market for global lawyers, having no partnership agreement could lead to restrictive regulations against leading law firms in the UK that want to provide services in the EU27. It is possible that 30 different regimes could impose restrictions and limitations on practice rights on UK lawyers and law firms. For example, subject to any potential visa requirements, French lawyers could be providing on-site legal advice to UK businesses, but the reverse would not be true.

Unless alternative arrangements are agreed, UK lawyers would lose the right to represent their clients before EU courts prior to the UK's exit. They would no longer be authorised to carry out that work. Clients of UK lawyers would no longer automatically benefit from client-lawyer confidentiality, until an alternative is agreed, as the CJEU does not recognise the privileged nature of communications between a lawyer who is not qualified in the EU and a client. It is essential that the Government negotiate mutual access for lawyers to practise law and base themselves in the UK and the EU, and that should include rights of audience in EU courts and legal professional privilege at the EU Commission.

We know that the Government are seeking an agreement like the comprehensive economic and trade agreement, but CETA provides voluntary, not binding, guidelines for concluding mutual recognition agreements between professional bodies. As the Law Society has stated, a CETA-style agreement

“is essentially a ‘no deal’ outcome for the legal services sector...The CETA style agreement would lead to a lack of legal certainty which would affect business confidence and have a negative wider impact on the UK economy”.

We need to make sure that the UK is a global centre for legal services and that we promote it across Europe and internationally. I hope the Minister will address my points and the questions in the Committee's report, in her reply.

2.7 pm

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck, and to follow the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous). When it comes to the implications of Brexit, it is fair to say that the impact on the justice system is not always at the top of everyone's list of priorities. It might even be thought of as a niche issue, but it is absolutely crucial. If I could do one thing today, it would be to emphasise that the justice system—the legal structures and arrangements that we have—underpin vital aspects of our democracy, the strength of our economy and the credibility of our institutions, including our own Parliament. It safeguards the rights of citizens and the balance of our constitution. When we discuss this issue, it is important to acknowledge that it resonates far more widely than might initially be perceived.

I will take a few moments to build on the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), but will preface that with one point. One of the striking things in my experience on the Justice Committee is the extent to which it has been possible to act in a truly cross-party way, which is of itself an acknowledgment that these issues are not party political and have the wider impact that I referred to.

Before moving on to the issue of crime and security, I want to echo the remarks made by the Committee Chair, my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), about interpretation of retained law. It is important to make the point that judges are rightly nervous about being dragged into the political arena. We take it for granted that judges interpret the law without fear or favour. Typically in this country, they do not get into the papers as they do in other countries, and that is exactly the way we want to keep it, but we must recognise the reality of the situation. If there is a case in which a judge of the Supreme Court decides to pray in aid European case law, that will be perceived to be a far more political decision than it would have been perceived previously. People will say, "That's it. Here we go. These judges are intending to thwart the will of the people and keep us in the European Union via the back door." I completely understand that judges are rightly wary of being perceived in that light. It is incumbent on the Government to give them all possible clarity and guidance so they can say, "This is a matter for Parliament. Parliament has given us this guidance. If you want it changed, speak to your MP." That is appropriate and fair.

Many, including our Committee and the Bar Council, have called for crime and policing and the wider issue of the justice system to be given a separate negotiating track. Those issues are of such importance that, in the words of the Bar Council, they cannot be bargained away like a lamb quota. They are of such significance to our democracy and our economy that they ought to be given priority. The rule of law, access to justice and crime and policing measures are not trifling matters.

It is important to recognise that our Prime Minister, when she was Home Secretary, recognised the importance of the European arrest warrant. After all, in 2014, when she was Home Secretary, she exercised the UK's right, which was secured at Lisbon in 2007, to leave and then rejoin selected justice and home affairs measures. She said that losing access

"would risk harmful individuals walking free and escaping justice, and would seriously harm the capability of our law enforcement agencies to keep the public safe".

In our country, the National Crime Agency said that leaving the EAW would pose a huge public protection risk to the UK. It has been broadly effective.

Although I entirely accept that the British Government's intention is to replicate the EAW—I suspect the EU will want to do the same—complexities will arise. One very obvious example that people discuss is that many countries in the European Union have constitutional bars on extraditing their own citizens to non-EU countries. How will we deal with that? I am sure there is a way through it, but it must be discussed. The right hon. Member for Delyn ably made the point that we cannot leave that sort of thing to the last moment, because that will lead to criminals going free and justice being evaded.

Through the European Criminal Records Information Exchange System—ECRIS—the UK exchanges tens of thousands of pieces of information about criminal convictions each year. The second-generation Schengen Information System—SIS II—gives the UK real-time access to all European arrest warrants and other alerts on matters including missing persons. The point is that that has real-life implications. To give an example from September 2017—in fact, the Government's own example—a prolific sex offender fled the UK on bail, was arrested in France after a road traffic collision, gave a fake name, but was arrested on a SIS II alert that had been entered by UK law enforcement. No wonder the National Crime Agency says that

"loss of access to SIS II would seriously inhibit the UK's ability to identify and arrest people who pose a threat to public safety".

It described it as a game-changer for UK law enforcement.

I am sure we will be able to negotiate an arrangement with SIS II but, lest we forget, it applies to only 26 EU member states and four non-EU Schengen countries—Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland—all of which have different, separate and nuanced arrangements. It is not straightforward. Of course, the EU will need to be flexible here. If ever there were a requirement to think flexibly to make something work, this is it. The EU will need to take account of the UK's historic role in setting up some of these arrangements, developing the databases, supporting them, and contributing enormously to that crucial information.

The big stumbling block that we will have to deal with is the issue of access to data—the so-called adequacy decision. Unless we can solve that and satisfy the European Union that we can have an arrangement that allows that data to be shared, that will be the pillar of the future arrangement. If that pillar is in place, we will have difficulties. Lest we forget, any arrangement we agree with the European Union could get referred to the European Court of Justice, which could strike it down. It is critical that we give this matter early attention. If we do not, there is a danger to justice and of criminals going free. That is why it must be given the most urgent priority.

2.15 pm

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I was a member of the Justice Committee when the report was produced in the previous Parliament. It is good to join my former colleagues and other hon. Members in this debate.

I want to concentrate on the implications for children mentioned in the Committee's report. I have been speaking as often as I can about what Brexit will mean for our children. I tabled several amendments to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, and I would like to speak about some of the issues I raised then. They have also been raised extensively in the House of Lords, including by the noble Baroness Butler-Sloss and Baroness Tyler, and my noble Friends Baroness Sherlock and Baroness Massey, as recently as their debate on the Bill on 5 March. Every single one of us has pleaded with the Government to give the utmost priority to the protection of children when we leave the European Union. Here we are, as other hon. Members have said, with exactly a year to go, and the Government are still expressing no more than a wish for close co-operation, without any indication of substantive progress. We need to hear exactly what the Government are doing.

The concerns I want to speak about arise from two issues raised in the Select Committee's report. The first, which has been discussed extensively this afternoon, relates to criminal law and the ability we enjoy now, under a range of European Union instruments, agencies and mechanisms—including Eurodac, the European arrest warrant, Eurojust, Schengen Information System II and so on—to pursue offenders and bring them to justice across the European Union. Those instruments have all been especially important in the protection of children, who face a rising risk of complex cross-border crime, such as trafficking, child sexual exploitation, grooming and online abuse.

We all agree that close co-operation on matters of criminal justice is the goal of not only the Government but the European Union, but we are no further forward in knowing how the Government intend to achieve that, and how they will maintain, adapt or replace our engagement with those institutions post Brexit. A further anxiety has arisen recently: Ministers have refused to incorporate the charter of fundamental rights into UK law in the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill or to recognise the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the EU after Brexit. The problem that that raises was highlighted recently by the case of O'Connor, referred by the Irish Supreme Court to the Court of Justice of the European Union on 1 February. That case relates to whether the Irish Government should execute a European arrest warrant request from the UK for an Irish citizen, which would entail his potentially being imprisoned in the UK after Brexit, when we no longer adhere to the European Union charter. We can all see the dangers for the protection of children that might arise from the circumstances highlighted by that case.

The anxieties do not just relate to the criminal justice system. The Select Committee's report deals in detail with family law, on which the position is equally uncertain and fraught with risk. Important provisions in the Brussels IIa regulation, which deals with divorce and with child residence and contact arrangements, including, very importantly, the issue of child abduction—the unlawful removal of a child from the care of the parent—and in the EU maintenance regulation of 2009 cover matters of jurisdiction of enforcement. They put in place a reciprocal system for mutual recognition of the decisions of each member state's courts across the European Union.

Again, the Government say that they want a coherent set of common rules that will be clear about which country's courts can hear a dispute, which country's laws will apply to resolve it and how judgments should be recognised and enforced across borders after Brexit. However, in relation to family law the process of achieving that remains opaque. For a start, although I assume we will incorporate the provisions of Brussels IIa into UK law under the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, thus obliging our courts to continue to apply the decisions of the courts of other EU countries, the reciprocal nature of Brussels II means that there will be nothing we can do once we leave the EU to force the courts of those countries to apply the decisions of our courts unless we can make alternative arrangements.

What is more, Brussels IIa is now being renegotiated—upgraded, as it were, and indeed the UK Government have played an active role in those renegotiations—but the changes are unlikely to take effect before Brexit. If we incorporate the Brussels II rules into UK law under the withdrawal Bill, they will quickly, if not almost immediately, be superseded by that later legislation.

In their response to the Select Committee report, the Government acknowledge that we might have to fall back on the arrangements in the Hague and Lugano conventions. Everyone recognises, however, that those conventions are inferior in important respects to the more robust and speedier processes available under Brussels IIa—especially and troublingly in relation to child abduction—which the renegotiation seeks to strengthen further. As the Committee heard in our evidence sessions, the existence of Brussels IIa has meant that there has been less incentive to keep the Hague convention up to date, and because most lawyers have become accustomed to relying on Brussels IIa, there is a lack of experience in applying and using the provisions of the Hague convention.

Furthermore, if Ministers seek to rely on the Hague convention, it is still not clear to me whether the UK will have to ratify it in our own right after Brexit—we participate now by virtue of our European Union membership. Yet the requisite three months' notice to do so means that time is pressing if we are not to be left with a gap in the more limited protections that the Hague convention can offer in relation to family law.

I know, as do all my colleagues, that the Minister is well aware of and concerned about both the complexity and the urgency of all these issues. I have to say, however, that the Government response to the Committee's report is worryingly thin. I join colleagues throughout the House in pressing the Minister to update us on where the Government are with negotiations on Brussels IIa, the maintenance regulation, the Lugano convention and the Hague convention, including the possible Hague re-ratification. Also, what guarantees will she give the House that a seamless system of international judicial co-operation, mutual recognition, and criminal and civil justice measures will be in place, without gaps, to ensure the continuing and vital protection of children at the moment of our exit and in future? I look forward to her detailed response.

2.23 pm

**Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck.

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

I pay tribute to the Select Committee and its Chair, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), for their concise, clear and balanced report on how Brexit could impact on criminal and civil justice and the legal industry. I feel like an interloper at a Justice Committee club meeting today, so I shall start by trying to make friends, by congratulating everyone on their excellent speeches and saying that I agree with almost everything that has been said—indeed, I agree with almost everything in the report as well, including the four recommendations that the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) highlighted, so I will not repeat them.

Broadly speaking the Government, too, seem to agree with what we are all saying, so in one sense we are singing from the same hymn sheet, but the debate has provided an excellent opportunity to press them on what if any progress has been made in pursuing their goals and in overcoming the many obstacles highlighted in the report. As the Chair of the Committee said in opening the debate, good intentions are no longer enough. He called for urgency, which is exactly what the Select Committee on Home Affairs—where I feel slightly more at home—also called for in a recent report.

The right hon. Member for Delyn and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) rightly said that the issue is now not so much about the Government's broad objectives as about the how, the when and the details, which need to concern us now. Before I go into that, however, Members have rightly flagged up a number of the benefits of EU systems and laws for justice in the United Kingdom, reflecting the point that we are debating, so I shall turn briefly to their contributions.

In the area of criminal justice, the right hon. Member for Delyn, the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) and the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston all highlighted a number of important EU schemes and agencies. First and foremost, the European arrest warrant, while not perfect, is definitely and significantly better than the alternatives. The hon. Member for Cheltenham explained one reason why that is the case, but there are others, and we have seen certain countries take a long time to negotiate and have access to alternatives.

We have also heard about Europol, the co-operation and data sharing that come with that institution, and how it has become critical to policing in the United Kingdom. Only last year membership of Europol proved pivotal in helping Police Scotland and the Romanian police to dismantle an organised crime network that was involved in the trafficking of victims for sexual exploitation. Day in, day out we hear a lot of other examples of that type of work being carried out with the help of Europol.

Eurojust brings clear benefits when it co-ordinates prosecutions where more than two countries are affected. We heard about the range of data sharing agreements such as ECRIS, SIS II and the Prüm treaty, which have brought huge benefits to our police forces. In the realm of civil justice, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston spoke expertly about the benefits of Brussels IIa, in particular in cases of child abduction. The Committee report, however, is balanced and not starry-eyed about such EU institutions, acknowledging that they are not

perfect—for example, in divorce cases Brussels II seems to encourage a race to issue proceedings, therefore discouraging mediation.

The Committee Chair highlighted the benefit, albeit again not without flaws, of the maintenance regulation, to which there seems to be no obvious alternative after Brexit. Finally, on legal services, the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) highlighted, among other things, the huge importance of rules that allow for the free movement of lawyers and legal services, including mutual recognition of qualifications and practising rights. Members therefore rightly asked a huge number of questions to which it would be good to have answers from the Government.

In relation to criminal justice, everyone might agree on the importance of maintaining the “closest possible co-operation”, as the report says, but achieving that will be complicated. For example, on Europol, other third countries' arrangements clearly do not bring them the same benefits as membership does for the UK. There have already been a number of Rob Wainwright quotes, and I will fling in a final one from before the Brexit referendum. He warned that leaving the EU meant that in essence the UK could become “a second-tier member” of the Europol club. We need to ask: what exactly are the Government seeking to achieve in negotiations? Norway and Iceland show that access—or even establishing similar arrangements—to the European arrest warrant and Prüm is not straightforward. What is Government's thinking about how to replicate the mutual benefits of those schemes?

As the hon. Member for Cheltenham highlighted, it is increasingly apparent that the adequacy of our data protection regime will be pivotal. Standards will be applied more strictly and more broadly once we are outside the EU. There are concerns that the provisions of the Data Protection Bill could fall short—one area of concern is the sweeping immigration exemption. Similarly, the UK's surveillance and interception regime will be exposed to a new level of scrutiny by EU institutions after exit. What work is ongoing to ensure that UK legislation and arrangements will survive such detailed scrutiny?

As other Members have said, the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice is an issue that cuts across many of those subjects. My party has no problem with the European Court of Justice and its possible jurisdiction, but what I want from the Government is at least an assurance that ensuring that our citizens continue to benefit from EU justice measures far outweighs the strange obsession that some have about ending the Court's jurisdiction. That is a red line that should be deleted, at least in so far as it comes to justice and home affairs issues.

**Kate Green:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing attention in more detail to the issue of the European Court of Justice. Particularly in relation to family matters, its oversight is inevitably confined, given the nature of the reciprocal arrangements, to matters of process rather than the substance of law. Does he not agree that the Government could perhaps be more relaxed about the Court's continuing engagement in our law?

**Stuart C. McDonald:** As I said, I am very relaxed about European Court of Justice jurisdiction generally, but the hon. Lady and the Committee report make a

case, specifically with regard to matters of procedure or even jurisdiction, for there being no reason for the Government to be overly concerned with the role of the Court at all.

The Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, also rightly flagged up the issue of clause 6 of the exit Bill. I agree that it is unhelpful and needs to be strengthened; instead of guiding or directing judges, it seems to be buck passing. We need to protect judges from accusations of making political decisions, as the hon. Member for Cheltenham rightly explained.

The right hon. Member for Delyn flagged up the question of whether all this can be managed in less than two years. I stand to be corrected, but with justice and home affairs being areas of shared competence, I understand that agreements on participation in some of these schemes may well need approval both from the EU institutions and from individual member states. Conceivably, in some of those member states, that could mean parliamentary ratification or even a referendum. Will the Government give some clarity on whether that is their understanding, and on what contingency plans exist for that possibility?

**David Hanson:** It would also be helpful to have clarity on whether there is a cost for the UK to access these services in the event of any co-operation in due course and, if so, what estimate the Government have made of that cost.

**Stuart C. McDonald:** That is a very fair point, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in that regard. What are the contingency plans if it becomes apparent very soon that we will not be able to secure all these arrangements within the current proposed timeframe?

Finally, although justice is a devolved matter and Scotland has its own distinct legal system, it will be UK Ministers doing the negotiating. As ever, I take the opportunity to exhort the Minister and her colleagues to work as closely as possible with counterparts in Edinburgh, to make sure that the implications for the Scottish justice system are properly taken into account and reflected.

2.31 pm

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I thank the Chair of the Justice Committee, the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), and the other members of the Committee for their excellent report. I was a member of the Justice Committee from 2010 to 2015 and remember many such excellent reports.

The UK's status as an international hub for legal and financial services and its attractiveness to businesses depend not only on access to the EU legal services market, but on its close and comprehensive cross-border and civil judicial co-operation. I will start by concentrating on three areas that most hon. Members have spoken about. First, in relation to civil justice, we are in a unique position where the judgments of our court are enforceable both in European Union member states and in many Commonwealth states. That is very important for the UK's role as a hub for international litigation. Therefore, it is critical for British citizens, businesses and institutions that the Government maintain our position.

In civil and family law, European Union regulations provide certainty on what jurisdiction should hear disputes while allowing for the automatic recognition and enforcement of judgments throughout the EU. Does the Minister share our concern that cross-border divorce and child custody disputes could become much more difficult unless Britain can secure effective judicial co-operation arrangements with the European Union after Brexit?

Many hon. Members spoke about the criminal justice system. We must remember that crime, and especially more serious and organised crime, increasingly does not recognise national borders. Even the less serious crimes are increasingly likely to have a cross-border element. Foreign nationals who commit crime in the UK often flee abroad, and some crimes can be committed easily across national boundaries, such as child exploitation, fraud and identity theft. In the UK, there has been a massive increase in people trafficking offences. Police and the judicial authorities need to be able to co-operate internationally to combat crime and bring perpetrators to justice.

I hope the Minister agrees that co-operation through case-by-case contacts or even bilateral agreements is likely to be more cumbersome when we are out of the system, especially where several states are involved. Under our European Union framework, we have co-operated through mutual recognition of key elements of one another's systems, with minimum standards applicable in all states for certain factors, together with mutual legal assistance measures that are understood and applied in all the member states.

As we withdraw from the European Union, can the Minister assure the House that her Government will secure the speedy arrests of suspects wanted by the British police with minimum bureaucracy via the use of the European arrest warrant? Does the Minister agree with the assessment of the EU Home Affairs Subcommittee, which states:

"Any operational gap between the European Arrest Warrant ceasing to apply after Brexit and a suitable replacement coming into force would pose an unacceptable risk to the people of the UK?"

Given that it took Iceland and Norway 13 years to negotiate extradition agreements with the European Union, does the Minister believe that there will be a gap between the UK leaving the European arrest warrant and agreeing a replacement system?

What assessment has the Minister made of the impact on victims if there is no European arrest warrant agreement after the UK leaves the European Union? What are the Government's proposals to deal with cross-border investigations into drug cartels, people trafficking networks and fraud? Will we be in a position to secure evidence from overseas using the mechanisms currently in use in the European Union? What mechanisms will be put in place so that we can rapidly access fingerprinting and other identification databases for overseas convictions, sentencing and other purposes, to which we currently have access? I am sure the Minister is aware of the growth in co-operation through Europol, Eurojust and the European Public Prosecutor, which has made it easier to deal with crime, especially when it crosses borders. What is the Government's plan to replace those institutions or fill the gaps left by them?

[*Yasmin Qureshi*]

The UK legal services market is worth £25.7 billion in total, employing 370,000 people and generating an estimated £3.3 billion of net export revenue in 2015. Central to that market is the ability of barristers, solicitors and other legal professionals to provide legal services in the EU. Equally important is the fact that, our exporters' confidence in doing business abroad depends greatly on the ability of their lawyers to establish and provide services in the countries in which they seek to trade and invest. Numerous aspects of barristers' and solicitors' work will no longer be possible if we leave the European economic area, unless current cross-border rights are preserved.

Does the Minister agree that, in formulating their negotiating strategy, the Government should have regard to the nature of the legal work that comes to the UK as a consequence of the UK legal profession's expertise, not least in European Union law? What measures are the Government taking to maintain cross-border legal practice rights and opportunities for the UK legal sector, given efforts by European Union law firms to use Brexit to win clients from UK competitors?

The European Union charter of fundamental rights sets out a range of civil, political and social rights enjoyed by European Union citizens. Why does this Government's policy of incorporating EU law into UK law exclude the European Union charter of fundamental rights? Does the Minister agree that, in the light of everything said in the debate, there must be a continuing role for the European Court of Justice during this time?

Labour's view is that, beyond a transitional phase, we would seek a shared court-like body to oversee disputes and enforce rights and protection. Obviously, the precise nature of this shared court is subject to negotiation. We are flexible about how that would be achieved. It is important that there is an independent court to oversee the close new agreement we reach with the EU. It is vital that that is done to ensure that individuals, institutions and countries can enforce and protect workplace rights, consumer rights, environmental rights and more.

**Robert Neill:** I have been listening with great care to the hon. Lady's speech and I very much welcome the approach that she has adopted. She talks about a future court to enforce these matters, for which I have much sympathy, but does her party rule out participation in the EFTA court as being a potential solution to the problem she rightly highlights?

**Yasmin Qureshi:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's question. Our position is that there should be a system. What that system entails and how it works is subject to negotiation, but we should have something that makes it easier to resolve issues.

In concluding, I want to summarise some of the things that hon. Members mentioned. My right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) spoke about very important crime issues. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) talked about the legal services sector and how we are ahead in it. My hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) rightly spoke about the impact of our leaving the European Union on children and their rights. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) made the interesting point that crime, civil

justice, children's rights and legal services should not be bargaining chips, but should be placed on a separate track and taken out of the contentious political debate. That would be a helpful way forward. The hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) rightly raised the impact on Scotland.

Everyone is aware that numerous treaties will have to be made to cover each and every area of law we have talked about. We will need not one set of treaties but treaties with 27 or 28 countries, with some opting in and some opting out. It will be a lengthy and complex process. I reiterate the questions asked earlier. How far have the Ministry of Justice and the Government got with drafting the relevant legislation and treaties? Which have been written and which have not? How are they progressing? When will they come to Parliament for debate? When will we be able to feel that these things will happen? Real issues have been raised, and many Members feel that, when we leave, we may be without the systems we currently have that make the criminal and civil justice systems much easier to deal with.

2.42 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on securing this debate—his second in two days—on a very important subject. I also thank him and his fellow Committee members, past and present, for their important report of March last year.

As a former barrister, I fully understand the importance of obtaining the right deal for the justice system as we leave the EU. My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) made a powerful speech about the many reasons why our justice system is important, and I agree with him. The Government recognise the importance of the legal sector. I know that because the Prime Minister highlighted it earlier this month in her Mansion House speech. She not only referred specifically to the importance of civil judicial enforcement and the mutual recognition of qualifications, but identified a few areas where the UK and EU economies were linked, one of which was law.

Before I deal with the issues Members raised, let me show how the Government have listened to the important points made by the Justice Committee and others. In its report, the Committee stated that we need certainty during any implementation period and that we must recognise the importance of criminal justice, and of mutual recognition and enforcement. It also highlighted the role of legal services. All those points have been and continue to be listened to. On implementation, the Committee stated that it was concerned that we would move to an inferior type of arrangement for a transitional period, and that it wanted to remove the risk of uncertainty. I hope the Committee is pleased that, in the implementation period, we will ensure that we have the same common rules so that our laws remain in place. There will be no inferior relationship in that period.

The Committee stated that we should prioritise EU-UK co-operation on criminal justice and that that serious matter should be negotiated separately. My hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst rightly identified that the Prime Minister has recognised the importance

of this area, as she did when she was Home Secretary. She said in her Munich speech that we are “unconditionally committed to maintaining” Europe’s security now and after our withdrawal from the EU because “our first duty” as a nation is “to protect our citizens”.

On commercial law, the Committee outlined that the Rome I and Rome II regulations on applicable law rules do not require reciprocity and could be incorporated into domestic law. That is precisely what the Government are doing under the repeal Bill. The Committee asked us to ensure that maintaining the UK as a first-class commercial law centre is a top priority. It asked us to protect choice of law, and mutual recognition and enforcement. It stated that we should replicate the recast Brussels regulation and remain a party to the Lugano convention and The Hague convention. The Committee knows those are our ambitions, which we highlighted in our future partnership paper, along with the close relationship we want. We very much hope that we will ensure mutual recognition and enforcement in our separation agreement for cases started before Brexit.

Members will have noted in the Prime Minister’s recent Mansion House speech her desire to reach agreement on civil judicial co-operation. She referenced Lugano, company law and intellectual property law, and stressed the need for legal certainty and coherence. We seek to continue our participation in The Hague convention and the Lugano convention.

**Robert Neill:** I welcome the Minister’s assurance that that is the Government’s intention. I think everyone regards that as essential. On the urgency of getting agreement and specificity, is she aware of the recent survey by the international law firm Simmons and Simmons of its clients in Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands about the approach that will be taken to important English jurisdiction clauses in commercial contracts post Brexit? So much litigation takes place in the UK because contracts have clauses specifying English jurisdiction. Some 50% of those clients will move away from English law unless there is certainty soon. Good intentions are not enough. We need answers very soon.

**Lucy Frazer:** I very much understand the need for certainty and the importance of those clauses in contracts. There should be a level of legal certainty, because those contracts will be respected in the implementation period. Furthermore, as was stated—I cannot remember by whom—we can sign up to The Hague convention unilaterally. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham said in yesterday’s debate, that convention is not the gold standard, because certain types of jurisdiction clauses are not included. However, many are, and it should give business a level of certainty.

The Committee also referred to legal services. It is important that we recognise the value of that sector to jobs and our economy, and the fact that it underpins our financial services sector. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) identified many important points about the mutual recognition of qualifications. The Prime Minister has recognised that, too. She said

“it would make sense to continue to recognise each other’s qualifications in the future.”

That has been specifically recognised in relation to our agreement on citizens’ rights. Those citizens who remain have every right to continue to practise as they do at the moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst rightly identified that the European Parliament might say that what we are putting forward is unachievable. In any negotiation, I would not expect the other party and those who will be confirming the agreement to lie down and say they accept everything the UK puts forward. We must remember that it is a negotiation.

My hon. Friend mentioned competition from other jurisdictions and the Paris court. That is an important point, but we must remember that the UK is expanding its judicial offering. We have interests in Europe and in Britain as part of the EU, but recently we have also seen judicial co-operation and members of the Bar helping to establish courts in Dubai, Qatar and Kazakhstan. We can continue to thrive in those centres outside the EU.

My hon. Friend made an important point about feeding into DExEU. He can be assured that our negotiators at the Ministry of Justice are party to the teams, negotiating alongside DExEU in matters that affect justice. He should also be assured that we are discussing these important issues at ministerial level—I have had discussions with my counterpart in DExEU.

In relation to clause 6 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, Lord Keen, who took the debate in the House of Lords, said clearly that the Government have heard the views expressed by Members of the House of Lords, and that we will return to that point.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham made important points on cross-border security, including that, as a matter of principle, crime does not respect borders, and that many measures, including the European arrest warrant, are critical to our security. I was asked for a timetable. First, we were agreeing separation—budget and citizens’ rights—and have done so. Secondly, we were to agree an implementation period, and we have done that. We are now turning to the matters of the future partnership deal and security.

We want an ambitious deal. There are many examples of international agreements between Europol and other third countries, such as the US, but like both the right hon. Member for Delyn and my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham, I believe these matters will be solved because it is in the interests not just of us and our citizens but of other citizens.

**Alex Chalk:** We would all be interested to know whether those matters will be considered at the outset, potentially separately from other matters, or whether they will be thrown into the mix as something potentially to be bargained away.

**Lucy Frazer:** My hon. Friend should not assume that those points have not yet been considered. We are moving from an EU perspective to discuss these issues, and they will be considered.

**David Hanson:** I am concerned and interested in whether the matters we have debated will form part of the agreement to be put to Parliament in October or November, if we have a final vote then.

**Lucy Frazer:** I expect that the deal, of which that will form part, will be put to Parliament.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) rightly identified the importance of mutual enforcement and the mechanism to secure our future relationship. She asked for specifics in relation to the future relationship. The Government are looking at a number of options and are confident that an option will work. There are examples out there that other countries have used, and we would like a bespoke arrangement that works for our country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham made an important point about the independence and integrity of our judges. I agree that it is not for them to make political decisions in exercising their independent function as the judiciary. As a barrister, I regularly referred to foreign law—I am sure he has, too—in support of points I made in courts for a number of years to support or distinguish cases. That is not an unusual feature of what goes on in our tribunals.

**Alex Chalk:** My hon. and learned Friend is being generous with her time. The reality, however, is that looking to the High Court of Australia for interpretive guidance is entirely different from looking to the European Court of Justice in the post-Brexit context. One is not political and the other potentially is. The court of public opinion is a concern. That distinction must be taken into account.

**Lucy Frazer:** I understand the point, which my hon. Friend makes articulately. He is right that judges need guidance, and as I said the Government are looking at clause 6 as the Bill goes through the House.

My hon. Friend asked whether justice should be considered separately. The chairman of the Bar Council raised that point with me and with the Secretary of State. I understand and agree on the importance of the justice deal, which he reiterated throughout his speech.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) made an important point about children. I hope she will be pleased that, in the European Council guidelines on 23 March, the EU specifically stated that it is interested in considering judicial co-operation in matrimonial parental responsibility. Hon. Members have made important contributions on an important matter, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to answer them.

2.57 pm

**Robert Neill:** I am grateful to all Members who participated in the debate. These are important issues, which I hope we have been able to raise and stress their urgency to Government. I am grateful to the Minister for her response, which was as comprehensive and elegantly put as ever. I appreciate that she is well seized of these issues. It is important that we continue to have such debates to keep them to the fore.

[SIR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

I am sure we all want the Prime Minister to succeed in her objectives, and for my hon. and learned Friend the Minister and her colleagues to be able to assist the Prime Minister in achieving them. That will happen only if we continually make the case. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) rightly said, it may sometimes be seen as a niche topic, but it is fundamental. Without legal certainty, no international commercial arrangements can work. Without legal certainty, no form of justice or security co-operation can ultimately be underpinned. It is not a peripheral matter, which is why a separate track has been suggested to give it the prominence it needs.

I appreciate the point made about the same-state transition secured by the Prime Minister. That period is important. I accept that that gives certainty, but it takes us only up to the end of 2020 and, to give just one example, large-scale commercial litigation often takes more than two years, as the Minister will well know. It is therefore not a long period in those terms. We must bear that in mind—that is why it is so urgent.

I am delighted to see you in the Chair for the end of the debate, Sir Graham. I am sorry that you missed the advocacy fest that went before. I am grateful to all Members for their participation and I am sure we will seek to return to this matter.

**Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair):** I will look forward to reading the proceedings in *Hansard*.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Ninth Report of the Justice Committee, Session 2016-17, Implications of Brexit for the justice system, HC 750, and the Government response, HC 651.

## International Development: Education

3 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the First Report of the International Development Committee, DfID's work on education: Leaving no-one behind?, HC 367, and the Government response, HC 914.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Sir Graham. I first draw the House's attention to two relevant entries in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: last August I visited Liberia with RESULTS UK to look at health and education work there, and in 2015 I visited Jordan with Oxfam. I am also chair of the all-party parliamentary group on global education for all.

In November last year, the International Development Committee released our first report of this Parliament, on global education. Since then, the Department for International Development has published its education policy refresh and responded to our report. The bulk of the evidence gathering for the inquiry was undertaken by our predecessor Committee in the 2015 to 2017 Parliament, but the new Committee agreed to resume and conclude that inquiry. I thank members of both the current and predecessor Committees, and I particularly thank those who gave evidence to our inquiry. I especially express appreciation to the Send My Friend to School campaign for its excellent work. Send My Friend has had a real impact, engaging young people in this country in solidarity with children and young people around the world.

Education is, of course, one of the key pillars of development. The right to education is at the heart of the United Nations universal declaration of human rights and at the core of the sustainable development goals. It can indeed be the silver bullet, with the potential, alongside other measures, to reduce poverty, increase economic growth, significantly improve public health and even contribute to peace and security. That is why it is right that DFID should spend a significant proportion of its budget on education.

Since 2000 we have seen great global progress on education. The millennium development goals set an ambitious aim of achieving universal primary education by 2015. That target was not fully met; nevertheless, significant progress has been made. We saw, for example, a 50% reduction in the number of primary-age children out of school, a significant increase in global literacy rates and more girls in the poorest countries entering education than ever before.

Even with that progress, the statistics on those not in school remain staggering: 263 million children around the world are not in school and another 330 million are in school but judged not to be learning the basics. If we are to eliminate poverty, let alone tackle the challenge of inequality around the world, that needs to change. Of course, a child attending school does not on its own equate to learning, and as such the quality of education is just as important as access to places in schools.

We know that often, children arrive unprepared for school, teachers lack the skills, motivation or proper levels of remuneration required for teaching, and there is poor management and governance, all of which can undermine the quality of education available to children

and young people. The driver behind the millennium development goals was to get students into school, but they did not specifically address the quality of education that those children would receive once they were there. Equity between groups needs to be addressed and, once in school, children surely need to be taught both the basics and the transferable skills needed for the modern world, including the jobs and economy of the future.

To help combat those problems, the Committee reached the conclusion that the UK needs to invest more of its education funding in early years and technical education. The benefits of pre-primary education for later learning are well proven, and there is a real appetite amongst those who work in this area to do more. In its response, the Department committed to reviewing the effectiveness of its current spending on early years education this year. When she responds, I ask the Minister to update the House on the timescale for that review.

In 2015, the UN agreed the sustainable development goals. SDG 4 has a broad remit and commits the nations of the world to improving access to and quality and equity in education. We know that to do so will require a huge leap of progress, which is achievable only with a combination of political will, strong and inclusive systems of education and long-term, sustainable funding. The global context is hugely challenging. Population displacement as a consequence of conflict or of climate change and other natural events is widespread. It is in that context that the Committee decided to look at DFID's work on education.

I start with the crucial issue of funding. Globally, education funding remains substantially below the target level required to come close to meeting the ambitions of SDG 4. It has been estimated that the annual financing gap over the period of the global goals is about \$39 billion. That is the additional amount we need to spend to reach universality in pre-primary, primary and secondary education with good quality. We have seen DFID's funding for education fall since 2011. In 2011, the percentage of the UK's total official development assistance spent on education was above 10%. By 2015, that had fallen to just above 7%. I understand that that was an exceptionally low figure, and I will be grateful if the Minister can give us a figure for the percentage of the UK's total ODA spend on education in 2016, even if that is an estimate. My assumption, from the research I have done, is that the figure is probably now around 9% to 10%.

The Committee took evidence from the Malala Fund and the Global Campaign for Education, which said that the UK should be doing much more and should commit to allocating at least 15% of UK aid to education. The Committee concluded that we would like to see the amount of UK overseas development assistance going to education increase over the course of the next spending review. We commend DFID for striving to improve the value for money of what it spends on education, but we reached the conclusion that alongside that proper focus on value for money, we need additional total spending as well.

In the Government's response, DFID said:

"The precise level of spending on education through country programmes will be determined by country offices as they consider development needs and opportunities locally."

I invite the Minister to ensure that country offices give education the high priority it surely deserves. In response to the Committee's recommendation that DFID should

[Stephen Twigg]

support the international finance facility for education, the Department stated that it is “considering its feasibility”, but is

“not yet in a position to support the proposal.”

Can the Minister outline when the Department might be able to reach a decision and, we hope, give support to that new financing facility on education?

Of course, DFID provides a lot of its education funding via multilaterals, most notably the Global Partnership for Education, which was established in 2002 with the aim of strengthening education systems in the poorest and middle-income countries. GPE works directly with Education Ministries in those countries to implement, monitor and evaluate their education work. Uniquely, GPE asks countries for a commitment from their Governments to increase the amount that they spend on education in return for the funding that it gives. The recent replenishment conference in Senegal in February saw 50 countries commit, as part of this, to increasing their domestic public expenditure on education. That is very positive and is to be welcomed.

The Committee recommended that the UK should agree to the full amount that GPE requested from the United Kingdom for that replenishment, which was £300 million over three years. We also said that, if the UK was to have a cap on its contribution, it should be announced early as a tool to encourage other donors to commit generously to the fund. In the event, DFID pledged significantly less than we requested—£225 million over three years. It is welcome that the United Kingdom remains a major funder of GPE, but I am disappointed that a more generous pledge was not made, and certainly that it was not made at an earlier stage.

The aim of SDG 4.5 is to

“eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training”.

We know that girls are far more likely than boys to be excluded from education in the poorest countries. It is often said in the development world, “If you educate a woman, you educate a nation”. That is supported by evidence. According to UNICEF, educating girls has a multiplier effect and brings a litany of other benefits in areas such as health. DFID has a positive story to tell when it comes to girls’ education. The Girls’ Education Challenge, launched in 2012, is a positive, innovative programme with the aim of getting the most marginalised girls into school. It has so far given around £300 million to projects in 18 different countries.

The evidence we received about the programme was overwhelmingly positive, and the Committee’s message is that DFID should continue to be at the forefront of such programmes to ensure girls’ and young women’s access to education. I know that the Department is currently reviewing the GEC. In the light of an Independent Commission on Aid Impact report, we recommended that the Department should certainly seek to fund programmes in the second stage of the GEC, particularly focusing on reducing the drop-out rate at key transition points in girls’ education.

We also know that disabled children face huge barriers to education, in our own country as well as globally. According to the World Bank, around 15% of the global population experience some form of disability.

Analysis by the Education Commission estimated that around half of all disabled children in low and middle-income countries are not in school at all. As Julia McGeown from Humanity and Inclusion told us:

“Disability is the biggest reason why children are out of school.”

As I have said, DFID has already shown leadership on education for girls and young women. It is now surely time for DFID to show the same leadership on the needs of disabled children.

According to much of the evidence we received, we have seen real progress as a result of the Department’s disability framework, which was recommended by our predecessor Committee in the 2010-15 Parliament. However, more now needs to be done to ensure that it is implemented right across the Department’s programmes and is integral to all aid, including that administered by other Government Departments.

When our predecessor Committee visited Kenya as part of this inquiry, we were impressed by the GEC project run by Leonard Cheshire Disability in Kisumu. The programme worked with disabled girls and, indeed, some boys, and there is a strong argument for the Department to look at that programme and to look at how it could be extended in Kenya and in other parts of the world. In particular, while we entirely understood the focus on disabled girls, one message we got from parents that we met, and also from some of the headteachers, was that they would like the Department to look at a similar programme for disabled boys.

In responding to the Committee’s recommendations on improving access to education, DFID states that it is looking to deepen international engagement in this area. Will the Minister set out in her response how we can use the upcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting here in London in April, and also the very welcome disability summit in July, to encourage this crucial international engagement? I ask her to particularly address the potential for the disability summit to be an opportunity for the UK to set out much more fully how we will support education for disabled children and young people in the longer term.

By 2030, the share of the extreme poor living in conflict-affected countries is expected to rise to more than 60%. We know that the number of displaced people has grown extraordinarily in the last two decades. In 1997, 34 million people—a very large figure—lived as displaced people, either as refugees or internally. That figure has almost doubled since, with 66 million people living as displaced people in 2016, about a third of which are refugees and two thirds of which are internally displaced. That is more than the population of the United Kingdom living as displaced people around the world.

Our predecessor Committee saw evidence of that when we visited Jordan and Lebanon as part of the inquiry. We witnessed at first hand the extraordinary support DFID has given to the Governments there, but we also saw and welcomed the remarkable hospitality of the Governments and peoples of those two countries in response to those who had fled conflict in neighbouring Syria. That work on education for Syrian refugees has made a real, life-saving difference to a whole generation of Syrian children who had to flee not only their homes but their country.

While we were in Jordan, we also visited a very impressive school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian children. At a time when the US Administration is threatening to cut its financial support for UNRWA, does the Minister agree that it is vital that we and other donors step in to ensure that UNRWA's remarkable and important work with Palestinian children is able to continue? We also visited Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. Migration flows in that part of Africa are very high because of conflicts in South Sudan, the Congo and elsewhere.

We know that more than half of the world's registered refugees of school age are not in school. The funding for education during humanitarian emergencies is not always readily available; less than 2% of all humanitarian funding goes towards education in emergencies. As conflicts become longer and more protracted, surely it is vital that the international community provides the funds and infrastructure for students to continue to get an education while they are displaced. Children caught up in crises should surely not be denied that basic right to an education. During the Committee's recent visit to Bangladesh, we had the opportunity to visit a child-friendly space in the sprawling Cox's Bazar refugee camp. Much more needs to be done there to ensure that Rohingya children get access to even the most basic of education during this crisis.

DFID played a leading role in establishing the Education Cannot Wait fund. The fund has attracted considerable financial support, about a third of which has come from this country, which is surely very welcome. It is all about seeking to help children living in emergencies, clearly through no fault of their own.

One aspect that I want to focus on before I finish is the importance of the school as a safe haven for children to learn even during conflict. A quarter of a billion children—some 246 million—are affected by violence each year, with an average of 15 life-threatening attacks on education establishments every single day. Too many children face the threat of their school being bombed or attacked by military or armed groups, and children in conflict-affected states have much higher drop-out and absence rates than elsewhere.

We know, for example, that Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school primary age children in sub-Saharan Africa, despite being one of the better-off countries in that region. One of the reasons for that is the continued attacks on education by Boko Haram. DFID has already taken steps to try to address that by, for example, seeking to ensure that schools are protected during conflicts and rebuilt afterwards. However, the UK can further take the lead on that if we sign up to the safe schools declaration, which outlines the positive and protective role that education can play and aims to prevent attacks on schools and education facilities during conflict.

The declaration has attracted international support from Canada to Côte d'Ivoire and from Afghanistan to France. I hope the Government will soon commit to becoming the 73rd signatory to the agreement. Perhaps the Minister can update the House today on progress towards achieving that.

The sustainable development goals' focus is on "leaving no one behind". If we are to translate that aspiration into reality, we need to give much higher priority to investing in global education. I welcome today's debate

as an opportunity both to discuss our report and the Government's response and also for us to demonstrate once again the very strong cross-party support for achieving the highest possible quality of education for children and young people around the world.

3.22 pm

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you presiding today, Sir Graham. I am grateful for the opportunity to comment briefly on the International Development Committee's excellent report, "DFID's work on education: Leaving no one behind?" It is not possible to criticise the many conclusions and recommendations, focusing as they do on targeting, low-income countries, access, girls, refugees and the rest. Clearly, the overwhelming response from the Department is that it agrees, too. I want to refer to one aspect of education, which I do not see mentioned—the journey to school. I am grateful to Emily Carr from EASST—the Eastern Alliance for Safe and Sustainable Transport—for her briefing. I should mention that EASST is a founding partner of the UK charity Fire Aid, which I chair and which delivers post-crash response aid, among other things, to 30 countries.

Among the UN and World Health Organisation's sustainable development goals for the next 15 years is a significant reduction in those killed and seriously injured on the world's roads. At present more than 1 million people die each year and around 20 million are seriously injured. Referring to data from UNICEF, the World Bank, the FIA Foundation, the World Health Organisation and the UN youth declaration for road safety, Emily's briefing on child casualties demonstrates the carnage that is happening on the world's roads, especially—but not exclusively—in low-income countries.

The figures are genuinely awful. Every day, 3,000 children and adolescents suffer a road traffic death or serious injury, and 500 children leave for school every day and do not return. Up to 700,000 children under the age of 18 are permanently disabled in road traffic crashes, while millions more experience long-term temporary disability. Children in low and middle-income countries are three times more likely to die in a crash than those in high-income countries, and 95% of such fatalities occur in low and middle-income countries. In the words of UNICEF and the FIA Foundation,

"We have to make our roads safe to learn."

As part of the safe system, road safety education in schools plays a vital part in tackling the issue. Sadly, there is limited research on the scale, scope or impact of road safety education. Will the Minister consider whether we can look at that gap in our knowledge? The Global Road Safety Partnership strongly recommends road safety education of children worldwide, backed up by the World Bank. I note that page 12 of the Government's response to recommendation 29 states:

"DFID will continue to develop and grow our education research portfolio...We will be developing large new programmes on critical research gaps."

The Minister might count road safety education as one of those critical research gaps.

The Select Committee report refers to disability as a barrier to accessing education. It comments that half of all disabled children are out of school and cites UNICEF's estimate that 90% of disabled children are out of school

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

in some areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), the Chair of the Select Committee, strongly referred to the disability question in his excellent opening contribution.

All the experts agree that road safety education is essential to help cut the horrendous numbers. Such education is neglected, because either it is not on the curriculum or, if it is included, it is not taught. Even where it is taught, lack of teacher training, no high quality resources and age inappropriateness impact on quality and outcomes. Small charities such as EASST help to deliver such training, saving lives as a result.

In its 2015 report, “Ten Strategies for Keeping Children Safe on the Road”, the World Health Organisation states:

“Road traffic death and injury are eminently preventable.”

The countries that have garnered the political will that is needed to address the issue have demonstrated this and in doing so have spared the lives of hundreds of thousands of children and saved their nations countless resources.

Road safety education can play a vital role, giving children the skills and knowledge to minimise risk where possible. I hope the Select Committee in its future endeavours and the Department might be able to keep that forgotten aspect of education in mind. We in the UK have among the safest roads in the world. The Department for Transport road safety brand, THINK!, is well known and respected internationally and can help directly or via charities such as EASST, which deliver the THINK! product.

In conclusion, the essence of the report and the Government’s response are very positive and welcome. Road crashes are the biggest killer of young people in the UK and worldwide. Not only does that not attract the attention I think it deserves, but it does not even get recognised as a mainstream issue. The report and the response rightly recognise the significant role that we play in the world of international development, and all of our political parties should be proud of our collective commitment to 0.7% of GDP for the world’s poor. Educating the world’s children is a fundamental aim and ambition. Getting them to and from school safely should be regarded as part of that project.

3.27 pm

**Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): It is a delight to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham, for the first time since you became Sir Graham rather than Mr Brady. Congratulations.

I am delighted that one of the focuses of the Department for International Development and in turn our Select Committee is global education—it has carried on over two Parliaments because we feel it is so important. There is one problem with the debate today. Members can speak for almost as long as they like, which means the Chairman of the Committee has said most of what I and everybody else wanted to say, because the Committee agrees pretty much on everything. It is not a party political Committee. We are at one. We sometimes disagree about how to get there, but we agree on what needs to be done.

The previous contribution on road safety was certainly interesting. It is crucial for girls—children—to be able to get to school safely. Not only might they be killed on the road, but that is a vulnerable place for girls going to school because they are often taken aside and raped and abused. That is one reason why many girls do not go to school, so we need to look at how we can continue to help them get to school and overcome such terrible barriers.

Today’s debate is the last before the Easter recess and there are not many Members here. It is not because they do not feel it is important—they do—but not many stay behind for the final Westminster Hall debate before the Easter recess, which is disappointing because the subject is so important.

I passionately believe that education is a fundamental human right, and that it underpins the improvement of lives and eradication of poverty, particularly for girls. We heard earlier that educating a girl improves the whole nation, which has been proved right in many studies. I also concur with the mantra of both DFID and those who drew up the sustainable development goals about leaving no one behind. It has been difficult to achieve that in developing countries, but I believe the whole world has now got it, and we need to make sure that every DFID policy aims to ensure that no one—it does not matter whether it is girls, women, disabled people or able-bodied people—should be left behind. This country could do better in some cases.

As the Committee’s report set out, there is still much work to do on global education, particularly in relation to the aspirations set out in the fourth sustainable development goal of the UN, on educational opportunities. It is of great concern that still, in 2018, 263 million children and young people around the world remain out of school. What is probably even more worrying is the fact that a further 330 million go to school but do not even learn the basics. We need better teacher training, and committed teachers, in many schools in developing countries, particularly in rural areas—it is much more difficult to get women teachers to go to those areas because they feel vulnerable. Perhaps we should look at how to help with teacher training to improve their skills. That would enable teachers to be paid better, because they would be doing a better, more comprehensive job. In some countries, teachers become teachers as soon as they leave school, with little training. That would not be something they chose, but something they had to do because no other jobs were available. That is not the best way to train teachers and improve education.

The report sets out goals and priorities for the coming year. It is clear from that DFID should be congratulated on some areas of its work. The UK is a world leader in international development. Its emphasis on education in developing countries is a key to its success. We know it is a leader around the world because, no matter where the Committee goes, we hear it from NGOs, schools, teachers and hospitals. Wherever it may be, people appreciate the effort and money that DFID puts in, and the degree to which this country cares about improving the lives of people in other countries.

There are, however, still areas in which we can push further, and there is much more work to do on global education. I want to highlight two areas of significance in the report: the education of women and girls, and

education in conflict areas, which the Committee Chairman mentioned—I hope I do not repeat too much of what he said.

DFID's focus on the education of women and girls in developing countries, which is reflected in the report, is a particular interest of mine. I am pleased that DFID continues to lead the way, and to highlight its importance on the national and international stage. Women and girls in developing countries should be to exposed high-quality education for a continued period, and not just primary education. Many countries now claim that they have universal primary education, but one does wonder, as I said, about the quality. We need to remove the barriers against girls continuing into secondary education, university and work training. One challenge is reducing the incidence of drop-out at the transition points in girls' education. It is heartening that the Government have made it a clear ambition to work with and assist hard-to-reach girls.

A problem for girls in many countries, and particularly in rural areas, is that they do not have sanitary protection, so one week in four they cannot go to school. That is a huge barrier and we should look at how to encourage developing countries to provide girls with sanitary protection so that they can have continued access to education. Some countries provide it. Strangely enough—it sounds dreadful—if girls have sanitary protection, they are less likely to be raped. We can help by encouraging countries to provide girls with sanitary protection.

I am pleased to learn from the response to the Committee's report that DFID has agreed to continue funding the Girls' Education Challenge into its second phase. We thought it was an impressive project that showcased the spirit of the Department's work on women's and girls' education in developing countries. The scheme works to ensure that the most marginalised girls have access to quality education. To date, the scheme has been successful and has had a positive impact on the lives of many. Remarkably, it has reached more than 2 million girls in total, including 34,539 girls with disabilities.

The Committee Chairman talked about the Leonard Cheshire school that we visited in Kenya, which was inspirational. It could teach lessons to some schools in this country that deal with disability. The reason it was so impressive was the leadership of the headteacher, without which it could never have been as good. She sends her son to a private school and her attitude was: "I don't mind paying for my child to go to private school, but why should the children in this school not have exactly the same quality of education that my son receives?" That is commendable and I have never seen a headteacher, in the many schools I have been to, with such a positive attitude to the education that they provide, which in this case is for the most disabled people. We met a girl with severe cerebral palsy who was determined that she would be a human rights lawyer and a champion of disabled people. It can be done.

As part of the Girls' Education Challenge, 69,782 teachers have been trained, and 4,687 classrooms have been constructed and renovated. In many cases in developing countries, the classrooms are there, but they desperately need renovation because they are in a dire condition. In addition, under the scheme, girls have been provided with resources such as textbooks and

have been given bursaries to enable them to study. I am sure Members would agree that that is impressive.

A second area of significance in the report was education in fragile and conflict-affected states. Young people caught up in conflict zones should not be deprived of their education. After all, they are the generation who in future will help to move their countries forward when conflict ends. As we know, children get only one opportunity for education. If they lose even one year because of being in those conflict-affected states, they will never catch up. Many will lose more than one year. Many children coming out of conflict areas such as Syria, and even the internally displaced children, are very stressed. It takes a long time to get them ready to absorb education. They need child-friendly spaces and they need to get through their systems their stress at seeing things none of us should see. They need help, and if we do not concentrate on those children who, because of their situation, have no chance of an education, the countries they come from—and to which they can hopefully return—or go to will be the poorer for it. I appreciate that DFID continues to support the Global Partnership for Education and they are well aligned on the view that there should be a focus on fragile and conflict-affected states, but I appeal to the Government to continue asserting influence in this sphere, as well as providing appropriate funding.

To sum up, I am very proud of the report produced by the Select Committee and reassured that, on the vast majority of global education issues, the Committee is aligned with the Department. Education should be at the heart of all we do. I strongly believe that it should be a continuing focus of DFID's project work in developing countries. Through education comes innovation, which will eventually help to promote social and economic improvement and assist with the achievement of self-sufficiency. I therefore urge my hon. Friend the Minister to continue with what the Department is doing, and to make it better and even more effective than it is. I thank the Minister for the money that the Department has put into global education, because without it, all those children would be much worse off.

3.40 pm

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): I echo the comments we have heard. As a member of the Select Committee, I was very pleased to be able to support this report. I have to refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I, too, attended the RESULTS UK trip to Liberia last year. Liberia is an interesting case study, because of the recent pilot that the Liberian Government have undertaken. They have trialled a number of alternative models of education: one whereby they have used Bridge International Academies, which we touch on in the report; one whereby they use local NGOs as providers; and one whereby they use completely non-profit international NGOs. When we spoke to some of the international NGOs on that trip, I was reassured about their motivation for engaging in those projects, which seemed very clear to me: they were there to help to reform the education system and then hand it back to the Government, with the idea that it should be the Government, in the long run, providing all or the vast majority of education services in-country.

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle]

Street Child, which works internationally, added only \$50 extra to the \$50 provided by the Government, meaning that there was \$100 to educate each child. However, Bridge Academies added hundreds of dollars extra to educate each child from external money, meaning that no Government in the developing world would be able to sustain that level of investment if the schools returned to the Government. The report that follows and the outcomes base are interesting because they show that the Street Child education was more inclusive, reached out to more young people and had the same or equivalent outcomes as Bridge Academies. That study means that the Department needs to relook at its involvement with Bridge Academies and other providers and consider value for money. It is one of the first case studies in which we have seen schools running side by side in one country and sometimes in the same city. The Government in Liberia want to move towards a project with the Global Partnership for Education whereby they would directly run the schools. Although we are not a major funder directly to Liberia, we are a funder through the GPE, and we need to look closely at that model and reflect that in our work. I hope the Minister will take it into consideration.

The GPE, whose Senegal replenishment conference I attended with the Secretary of State, requires countries to spend 20% of their tax revenue on education. We do not achieve that domestically, so we are asking developing countries to achieve a very high bar. DFID achieves only about 10%—we hope that that is growing—which poses the question: are we asking others to do something that we do not achieve ourselves, either in the international development budget or in our domestic budget? We need to reflect on that, because power is not just about being a funder and setting the rules, but about leading by example and showing others the way.

On the GPE and replenishment, we recommended in the report that the full amount—\$500 million, which is about £300 million—should be invested over the three-year term. I have written to the UK Statistics Authority about the use of Government statistics in this respect. The Government say in their response that there is a 50% increase on their previous contribution. I do not believe that fully reflects the picture. The pledge last time was £300 million over four years, which is £75 million a year. The pledge this time is £225 million over three years, not four, which is £75 million a year. The per-year figure is identical. The Department is right that we did not spend all our pledged money last time, which meant that we spent only about £50 million a year. We might spend the full amount this time, but we cannot compare what we spent to a pledge. One has to compare either a pledge with a pledge where we have maintained the same pledge, or a spend with a spend, in which case we cannot tell what we will spend until after the spending period. We have imposed almost exactly the same conditions in terms of the cap and performance indicators on these pledges as we did last time, which was one reason why we did not fulfil the full cap last time. This time, I hope the GPE manages to meet all our conditions and that it is able to draw down the whole amount.

We have given a very generous amount, and I do not want to take it away from the Department at all that we are the single biggest country donor and the second biggest donor after the EU, to which, of course, we have

contributed, in the GPE. We should be very proud of that, but we should be so proud that we do not have to fudge the figures. I would appreciate the Department coming back and saying, “Yes, we understand that for public relations purposes we did this, but the reality is that we are looking for a like-for-like match.”

I also note that, on the same day as the pledge was announced, the Department released its new plan—its policy refresh—for education. Broadly, it was a very positive policy refresh, but I am concerned about page 16, which states:

“Securing teacher reform will be politically challenging for national decision-makers. It will often require long negotiation with influential teachers’ unions which have the capability to mobilise at national scale should they oppose reform. Politicians who rely on teachers’ political support face difficult trade-offs in negotiating improvements”.

I am worried about the tone that that sets. It does not talk about unions in a positive way. It does not say that politicians who work with unions are more likely to get added value in reform if they bring teachers along. It sets up a clear dichotomy between reform and unions, which is a real shame. I would hate to see again the negative and pernicious attitude that was in the Department for Education with the Secretary of State a Government ago. He described unions and teachers as “The Blob”. I am sure that that is not what the Department meant, but that phrase was very poor and did not positively engage with teachers’ unions, which have played a very positive role globally and sit alongside our Secretary of State on the governing board of the GPE. We should see them as partners, not adversaries.

Finally, I want to touch upon some of the issues around the international finance facility for education. We recommended that the Department commit to that. It only partly agreed to do so in its response, saying that it will look at the issue and when it has greater detail it will decide. I am worried that this is the same approach that happened with the GPE. We asked for an early announcement and a pledge to refinance. The Government said, “Oh yes, just wait.” Only the day before did they announce—on the GPE—the amount we would pledge. If we are trying to leverage more money and support, we must announce early—we must be a forerunner, not a follower. With the GPE, we have pledged an amount now that is unlikely to reach the cap and really has not leveraged a greater amount. I worry that if in the international finance facility for education we do not pledge early, strongly and unequivocally, other countries and donors will hold off. I hope the Minister will be able to make a slightly stronger commitment than the Department did in its report.

I have picked out some of the things I disagree with in the Department’s response, but it is important to note that, on the vast majority of things, we are clearly at one—the Government, the Committee and, I hope, Parliament. We support global education. We understand the value that it gives to people and children in the developing world, particularly to young girls and people with disabilities, where we have led the way. We also understand the value for our country of providing a world that is more educated and more equipped to engage in positive economic activity, and that fulfils the human rights we value.

3.51 pm

**Paul Scully** (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham. I am grateful for your forbearance, given my lateness. Unfortunately I was unable to catch what I know must have been an excellent introduction by the Chairman of our Committee, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) that the speakers previous to her had said it all—well, I do not know what was said in the introduction, so I maybe have a slight advantage and will just bowl on anyway.

I want to tackle the other two issues that we covered in the report, beyond financing global education: improving access to education, and improving the quality and equity of education—of course, financing is the key to that. The Chairman of the Committee is to be commended for the fact that report took a good long time to go through because of its depth. I know that he was keen to follow through on the sustainable development goals. The millennium development goals and the sustainable development goals had transferred the international community's responsibility on education from just getting people into school, sitting down and looking at a blackboard for a few years to actually getting them learning and achieving something so that they can then play a positive role in their community.

For all the reasons that we have heard, education helps people develop their communities, economies and countries, not just through financial prosperity but by building democracy. That is the long-term view behind so many other areas of international development. When we speak in this place and speak to our constituents to quite rightly justify our 0.7% contribution, we can—we should—look really proudly at what we are achieving in getting people into school so that they can make a positive contribution that will help build their countries' democracies. That will reduce the need for people to emigrate from those countries, so that they can stay in their countries and build them. That also improves security—all those factors stem from education in the first place.

In the last Parliament, the Committee went to Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. We looked at barriers to girls' education in particular, some of which we have talked about. One odd, but no less serious, case was in the Samburu wildlife camp, where one poor girl was eaten by a crocodile on her way to get water for her family. As extreme as that is, it shows that in the most hostile environment in the world, not everything can be catered for.

We went to a PEAS—Promoting Equality in African Schools—school and looked at the lighting, which gave the girls a sense of security in getting around the school camp where they were boarding. They could also have lunch on site, because some headteachers feared that when they were off site, they were subject to predatory behaviour. Some girls were dragged into a situation where they could not carry on with their education, because they felt encumbered by the person who took them on board as a wife in that hostile environment and got them pregnant. It is really difficult in that culture and in those circumstances for a young girl to have a sense of independence and carry on their education. There was no greater example of that than in the Samburu tribe's practice of beading, whereby a Samburu warrior would put a necklace of beads around a girl's

neck and that girl would become his sexual partner, later to be married. She was effectively owned by that warrior. That restricted her for ever more from that point.

The sense of empowerment provided by lighting, safety and sanitary products can really help liberate girls. PEAS had a girls club that had some boys in it—those boys felt bold enough to join it. It gave them a sense of respect and of being able to discuss issues that are not normally discussed between the sexes in a Ugandan or Kenyan community. That can only help in the long term. Many Samburu and other nomadic people in the area had to move from area to area because of the lack of food and crops. We need to look at what more the Department for International Development and the international community can do to help them stabilise themselves, so that girls and boys can stay within one school and have a sense of continuity and, therefore, a sense of learning.

It is right that DFID stopped offering budget support many years ago, but we should still be influencing the domestic education system. We have talked about public and private schools, but in the Committee in the previous Parliament, the debate about the difference between public and private dampened down slightly when we actually saw what it meant in practice. There were a number of public schools that were still charging for things such as electricity, uniform and food, so there was still quite a considerable cost for many people, albeit within a public school setting. None the less, we need to compare the quality of private and public schools.

The Bridge schools in Liberia have been mentioned. When we saw the Bridge schools in Uganda, they were really a mixed bag. That comes partly from the teaching, which my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire mentioned. Teachers can only have so much training, and they rely on a tablet for their work. They read out the lesson plan from the tablet, rather than having a deeper understanding of what they are trying to teach the children sitting in front of them. That brings us back to the old millennium development goals, which, as we heard earlier, were just about having people sitting down and being lectured at, but not really learning. We need to find a way of connecting with domestic training in countries to ensure that the teachers are the right people for the job and have the skills they need to engage.

Finally, in the directly funded work that we saw about getting the most marginalised back into schools, we found that people were able to experiment outside the state system. We saw some examples of people with learning disabilities who were learning to count through dance. If the *Daily Mail* found out about that there would probably be a headline tomorrow, but they had a little space to experiment and trial these sorts of things, to see what works and what does not. We know in this country that people learn in different ways—some visualise, and some learn by rote—so differences in learning are really important to engage people and to ensure that no girl or boy is left behind.

**Sir Graham Brady (in the Chair):** We have four wind-ups to come, including from the Chair of the Select Committee. May I ask the Opposition spokesmen to try to keep their remarks to no more than about eight minutes, to ensure that everybody is heard?

4 pm

**David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

Before summing up for the Scottish National party, I want to commend the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for opening the debate eloquently. It was a fine speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), a member of the Committee, had hoped to be here today. He has had to return to Scotland, so I am afraid that hon. Members are lumped with me to provide the third party summing up for the SNP.

With your indulgence, Sir Graham, I would like to acknowledge some of the students from Eastbank Academy in Shettleston, in my constituency. It is fitting that as we discuss education we have children from Shettleston and Glasgow here. The education that our constituents get should always be at the forefront of our minds. We should strive every day to ensure that what they get in Shettleston is what they would get in Senegal.

It is difficult to sum up this debate, because Members have largely all said the same thing. As each one stood up, I found myself hacking bits of my speech out. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) was absolutely right to speak about safety on the way to school. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) put strong emphasis on girls going to school. There will be a certain amount of that in my own speech. The hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) spoke about the cost per head to educate, and about his experience in Liberia. I expect that he will continue to question the Government on their use of statistics.

One thing that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) mentioned was how we justify the 0.7% target to our constituents. I remember having a few very difficult hustings in June with people asking why we were committed to the 0.7% target. It is important that those of us who believe in fairness and equality argue strongly for that. I know it is not always popular, but sometimes it is better to be right than popular.

As someone who is not a member of the International Development Committee, I must say that I feel like a bit of an intruder in this debate, but I want to bring some personal experience to this afternoon's discussion. Last year I had the pleasure of visiting Tanzania with RESULTS UK—I also refer the House to my entry in the register—and I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Tanzania, has joined us for the debate. Tanzania has always had a special place in my heart, and finally getting the opportunity to visit was invaluable. During our visit we focused on education and nutrition. For the purposes of today's debate, I will focus my remarks primarily on education.

To start on a positive note, I was quite impressed when I visited Benjamin Mkapa Secondary School in Dar es Salaam, which has a rapidly emerging middle class. During the tour of the secondary school we visited a chemistry class, and I was struck by the number of girls studying chemistry. It would have put a lot of our schools to shame and was really encouraging. I will return to girls' education later.

As might be imagined, the challenges in an urban context were vastly different from those in a rural context. I remember being quite shocked on the first

day to learn that there were only 17 computers to serve a school of 2,000 pupils. Unfortunately, later in the week, by the time we reached the Bahi district near Dodoma, the situation in the primary schools was considerably worse. Children were being taught in a packed mud hut where there was literally no room to move. I remember looking down at the faces of kids lined up next to each other with no room to move, and the impact that had on me as I reflected on the schools in Glasgow that I go around on a weekly basis. It really moved me. My wife is a primary school teacher, and we regularly have discussions about class sizes. Class sizes of 60 to 150 are not unusual in Tanzania. As a naive new MP, I came away thinking about how we can fix these things.

The first major challenge is supporting children with additional support needs and those with physical disabilities. Alongside the noble Lord Watts, I remember being quite struck when we learned that a girl with a hearing impairment had no hearing aid and was sitting at the back of the class trying to lipread. She was about 17 rows back, and that struck me as absolutely bizarre.

Owing to Tanzania's famously conservative views towards family planning—the President actually said that family planning should take a holiday—teenage marriage and subsequent teenage pregnancy are major issues that mean young girls frequently do not finish their studies. That has been brought out in the debate, but the main issue I want to touch on is period poverty.

It is estimated that girls lose between one and two months of the year because of menstruating, all because they do not have access to sanitary products. According to the Netherlands development organisation's survey on schoolgirls' menstrual hygiene management, 84% of schools in Tanzania had no hand washing facilities, 86% had no access to clean water, 99% had no hand soap for washing in toilets, and an average of 56 girls used a single pit latrine in schools. Just 2% of schoolgirls, mainly in the urban environment, have access to disposable pads. In the villages, girls were using inappropriate materials to manage menstrual flow. We can have all these great strategies to try to engage young girls in the education system, but something as simple as a lack of tampons and decent sanitary facilities is clearly stopping them. Like the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire, I hope the Minister will address period poverty when she winds up the debate.

We all agree that schools should be safe and happy places where children can benefit from a good education. Unfortunately, millions of children around the world are not safe at school. That is why this year's "Send My Friend to School" campaign aims to make schools safe, calling on the UK Government to sign the safe schools declaration, as outlined by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. The safe schools declaration is an intergovernmental political commitment by which countries express support for protecting students, teachers and schools from attack in times in war. Thousands of young campaigners are already raising this important issue in schools across the country through the Send My Friend to School campaign.

The International Development Committee report suggested that DFID needs to establish a long-term, integrated strategy for supporting education in emergencies, especially in long-term crises. DFID's new policy report sets out the Department's plans to promote equitable

education systems that include the most marginalised children and address the challenges posed by conflict and instability. It recognises the scale of violence against schools and commits to deliver for children whose education is disrupted by conflict.

Around the world, 15 life-threatening attacks on education take place every single day. Signing the safe schools declaration at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting next month would further showcase the UK's leadership on global education and bolster DFID's commitment to supporting education in emergencies. So far, 73—more than one third—of the world's countries have endorsed the declaration, including the majority of NATO and EU members. The UK's failure to sign, when it has some of the most respected armed forces in the world, sends the wrong message to countries that more readily operate outside the bounds of global humanitarian norms.

In conclusion, I hope the Government will take action to sign the safe schools declaration. We have had a good debate today. The time for talk is over; the time for action is now.

4.7 pm

**Dan Carden** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Graham.

I congratulate my colleague and parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), on securing this important debate. His passion and expertise on this subject have shone through in his role as Chair of the International Development Committee, and I commend him for championing the importance of education and continuing to hold the Government's feet to the fire.

I am sure that many other Members would have liked to have been here today, but we are on the last debate of the parliamentary term before Easter. However, we have heard some great contributions from both sides of the Chamber.

My hon. Friend talked about education as a pillar of society, and I completely and utterly agree. He has made a clear argument for more of the DFID budget to be spent on education. There is a need for more girls to access education. In a few speeches we heard about the 263 million children who are not in school. That is, frankly, an astonishing figure that I do not think many people know about. He also focused on early years and technical education, and the barriers facing disabled children in education. A key point was that as conflicts become more protracted and people are displaced for far longer, we must focus much more of our efforts on education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) focused on road safety. The hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) talked generally about global education, and in particular about girls' education and the mantra, "Nobody left behind." My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) talked about the importance of public education, which I will return to, and of Global Partnership for Education funding. He also mentioned the important message of unity; we may criticise the Government and offer alternative suggestions, but there is real unity behind the DFID agenda. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) talked about access to education, the quality of education and girls' safety.

The Government have responded to 29 of the Committee's recommendations. Rather than go through each of them, in the interest of time I will make just three points. First, I welcome the Government's response to recommendation 10, which said:

"DFID should support the new International Financing Facility for Education...as an additional mechanism for leveraging funding into the provision of global education."

It is welcome that the Government are working closely with the Education Commission on the details of that proposal. I understand that there are important details still to be worked through, but as other Government donors are now considering whether and how much to contribute to that facility, the Government should think seriously about the signal that their early support could send to them. That should be a real consideration.

Secondly, the Global Partnership for Education is another crucial leg on the stool of education financing, which is covered in the Government's response to recommendations 7, 8 and 9. As with the international financing facility for education, other donors look to the UK to see what we will do. The International Development Committee made a loud and clear recommendation that DFID should make an early and significant pledge to the GPE before the February summit in Senegal. That would have set a different tone and signalled real global ambition. We will never know how much extra funding may have been pledged by other donors had the UK made an early commitment, but the Government missed a real opportunity. It is not fully clear why a decision was not taken earlier, and whether the delays were due to the change of Secretary of State at the end of 2017, but it may prove a costly mistake.

We are also deeply disappointed in the scale and ambition of the UK's pledge to the GPE. The Government say that by committing £225 million they have increased their annual contribution by 50%, but that figure does not tell the whole story. That point was picked up widely by hon. Members today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown. If we make a like-for-like comparison with the initial replenishment pledges, or with the amounts transferred rather than pledged, the picture is very different. Despite the need for greatly increased funding, that figure may represent a decline in commitment. I hope the Minister will discuss that pledge in her response. Is there any scope for the Government to consider an additional pledge to get back to the level of ambition and global leadership that Britain has previously shown on education?

Thirdly, I draw attention to the Government's response to recommendations 21, 22 and 23 of the Committee's report on private sector provision, low-fee schools and Bridge International Academies. On Bridge, it is deeply disappointing that the Government have not addressed or responded directly to the Committee's carefully balanced recommendation that DFID must take

"further steps to satisfy itself that the model of educational provision offered by Bridge International Academies offers an effective educational return on the ODA committed to it."

Let us remember that Bridge International Academies has been widely criticised, and even shut down in Uganda and Liberia. There is damning evidence about the volume of resources and investment that go into it.

[Dan Carden]

Aside from the wider question of private sector provision, the Government must respond more seriously to the specific point about Bridge International Academies. It is not acceptable simply to carry on investing in, and even to increase funding for, a failing model without sufficient evidence to support it. I hope the Minister will address that point in her response.

On the wider point of DFID's implicit support for private sector provision and for low-fee schools and academies, there is simply a fundamental difference between the Conservatives and the Labour party. We are deeply concerned by the Government's ideological dogma that leads them to open up public services in low-income countries to organisations such as Bridge International Academies. We have seen no compelling or credible evidence that the model works better than public sector provision.

On Monday, Labour launched its new policy paper, "A World For the Many, Not the Few", of which I have a copy here, if the Minister would like to take one away with her. In it, we commit to ensuring that British taxpayer-funded aid does not weaken crucial public services in developing countries. Public services, especially health and education, are perhaps our best line of defence against soaring global inequality. The UK should drive a positive global movement for universal, free, high-quality public services, not spend British taxpayers' money on weakening or undermining such services.

Labour has therefore said that, in government, we will end DFID funding and Government support for Bridge International Academies. We are clear about how we would respond to the Committee's important recommendations, and we would like the Government and the CDC Group to take them much more seriously too.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to those and other points. I thank hon. Members again for their contributions to the debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby for securing it.

4.15 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin):** I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing the debate along with his Committee. I thank the Committee for its engagement with and scrutiny of this important topic, and for the wide range of constructive recommendations in the report. I add my commendation for the work of Send My Friend to School in raising awareness across the country.

I assure hon. Members that the Government believe passionately in this agenda—in the importance of education and of the work we can do through our development budget to champion it around the world. Education is the single most effective thing in terms of unlocking potential and opening doors to economic development, so individuals can be active citizens and enjoy good health.

The economic benefits are quantified in different ways in different studies around the world, but there is no question but that for every year that someone spends in school, their lifetime earnings and the economic potential of their country substantially increases. There is also no question but that for every year of education,

the pressures of population growth, of child marriage and of infant mortality move in the right direction. That happens when we invest in education.

It is not only those of us in the Department for International Development who passionately believe that, but people across Government. It is wonderful to have a Foreign Secretary who champions that agenda. He described the impact of that multi-pronged tool as being the "Swiss army knife" of economic development around the world.

We have summarised the whole campaign in five words—12 years of quality education. Those five words are designed to summarise the length of the investment needed and to put an important emphasis on quality.

We heard a range of different and interesting contributions in the debate, throughout which several questions were addressed to me. I will pick up on a few of those. In terms of our international agenda, the UK-France summit highlighted that this is a global year of education, and we are working with the World Bank on that too. That important topic is thoroughly embedded in all the DFID country offices, with their range of expertise, and we will engage on it across the diplomatic network, in every country where we have a Foreign and Commonwealth Office presence.

We have a wonderful opportunity to showcase that agenda next month at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. I reassure hon. Members that "12 years of quality education" will have an important and prominent place at the summit, to get the 53 countries that are coming to the UK to make pledges on education and on that agenda. It is a great opportunity to demonstrate UK leadership in the area. In July we will also invite the world to London, for the disability summit to be held at the Olympic park, which is something we are doing alongside Kenya and the International Disability Alliance. That is another really important forum in which to highlight the work we can do around the world to improve the access to education for people with disabilities, who are sometimes very hard to reach.

Hon. Members asked about the safe schools declaration and spoke about the importance they attach to it. No one could disagree that this is an incredibly important area for us to explore and of course take action on. We very much welcome the spirit of the safe schools declaration, and we have been considering the concerns that exist about some of the accompanying guidelines for protecting schools and universities from military use during armed conflict. Those guidelines do not mirror the language of international humanitarian law, so we have been meeting the relevant civil society organisations to explore our concerns and to try to find a way forward. We are considering our next steps on that.

Hon. Members mentioned the importance in conflict areas of making sure that children do not miss out on education, which is why I am proud that DFID is one of the largest contributors to Education Cannot Wait. We are working with that organisation on education, particularly in relation to the Rohingya refugee crisis. We are working with experts to see what more could be done in Bangladesh and Burma to address that significant challenge.

I was also asked for an update on the effectiveness study regarding early years education. Obviously, it is an ongoing piece of work, but some initial findings will

be published this summer, which will cover five countries or regions—Liberia, in which a number of colleagues expressed a particular interest, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Jamaica, and Punjab in Pakistan.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) highlighted the absolutely tragic issue of people just being able to get to school safely. He will be interested in the work that we do to fund road safety research and he may also be interested to know that the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), who also plays an important role in championing this agenda, has arranged a meeting with me about it. The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse may want to come along and then I can go through in great detail with both of them what we are doing in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham) and the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) raised the important issue of sanitary protection and the challenges that it can present for girls and their access to school. That is very much the kind of initiative that has been funded through the Girls' Education Challenge, and several projects have been able to access that funding. We also do work on water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools. That was a very important topic to raise.

Hon. Members mentioned Bridge International Academies. Regarding this agenda, I emphasise that we are really trying to focus on the "12 years of quality education" and perhaps we do not take such an ideological stance as that outlined by the spokesman for the Opposition, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden). However, I can confirm that DFID does not currently provide any financial support for Bridge Academies, so that is clearly more of a historic issue than a current one.

I was surprised by the somewhat grudging tone of the remarks about the announcement of the money that we have put into the Global Partnership for Education, because we were its most significant funder, and of course it is important that we work with other Governments to encourage them to spend more on education, as well as with other organisations and other funding bodies. That fund is not the only way in which we fund education; in fact, the money we give to it represents only a small percentage of our education funding. Clearly, there has been some dispute, but for me the announcement of £225 million to be spent over three years places us in the lead for such funding.

Of course, the approach that we are taking to the international finance facility for education is still being developed. I think that it was Julia Gillard who, in her campaign for funding, described the UK's approach to the replenishment of this fund as being very rigorous in the way that we allocate funding to these types of organisations. We will not just hand out a cream cake, as she put it; we ensure that we are the tough friend who makes someone get up and run a 10 km race. That was her analogy and it shows the rigour with which we spend taxpayers' money around the world.

The work that we have done on education was published in February, and updated in line with the International Development Committee's recommendation. As I have said, it is about improving education quality and getting more children to learn the basics of literacy and numeracy.

In our approach, we focus on three areas of change. The first is to support countries to fundamentally rethink the way that teachers are recruited, trained and motivated.

For example, with our support, the Government of Ghana has endorsed ambitious teacher training reforms, including new standards for teacher education and a new framework for the curriculum, and those changes are really making a difference in the classroom.

Secondly, we will stand behind system reform that delivers results in the classroom and we agree with the Committee that the education advisers and the research that DFID can provide are a vital part of that offer to Governments. We also share our wider UK expertise, such as our curriculum, our national exams and our Ofsted inspection system. In Punjab in Pakistan, for example, UK support and expertise have contributed to systems reform that has seen the average literacy and numeracy scores of grade 3 children increase by more than 20 percentage points in just the last three years.

Thirdly, we will continue to commit to reaching the hard-to-reach girls and boys affected by crises. I was asked about the total amount that we spent in 2016. We spent £964 million of official development assistance on education, which is 11.3% of UK bilateral aid, and I can reassure hon. Members that education will remain a high priority for DFID spending.

In fact, we recognise that greater investment in education is needed to drive sustainable development goal 4, but other donors must also play an important part. To increase its value for money, education spending has to be efficient and effective, and we will support Governments to cut waste and to use public resources effectively. If we determine that a country can contribute more towards its education, we will indeed expect it to do so.

In conclusion, with our priorities clearly mapped out, we will draw on the full range of our capabilities and UK expertise to ensure that our programmes improve the lives of children around the world. We will show leadership on the world stage through a global year of learning. I thank members of the Committee for their report, and will leave a moment for the Chair of the Committee to respond.

4.28 pm

**Stephen Twigg:** We have had an excellent debate and I thank everyone who has taken part in it, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick), who rightly reminded us about the central importance of road safety education; the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), who is now the longest serving member of our Committee and an invaluable member, and she rightly reminded us about the central theme of the global goals of leaving no-one behind; my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle), who is one of the new members of the Committee, having joined the House last year, and he has brought great new energy and enthusiasm and represented us at the replenishment conference in Senegal; the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully), who spoke very powerfully, in particular about what we saw when we were in Uganda and Kenya; the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden), who spoke for the Scottish National party and who also spoke very powerfully, based on what he saw when he visited Tanzania; and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden), the shadow Minister, who is my constituency neighbour and who rightly reminded us of the central importance of leadership by our country if we are going to address these crucial issues.

[*Stephen Twigg*]

4.30 pm

Finally, I thank the Minister for her response to this debate, including responding to questions that I put during it. The theme that she set out—the five words—is one that can unite us all today: “12 years of quality education”.

*Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No.10(14)).*

# Written Statements

Thursday 29 March 2018

## TREASURY

### Convergence Programme

#### **The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):**

Article 121 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires the UK to send an annual convergence programme to the European Commission reporting upon its fiscal situation and policies. The UK's convergence programme will be sent to the European Commission by 30 April. This deadline was set in accordance with the European semester timetable for both convergence and national reform programmes. The UK will continue to have all of the rights, obligations and benefits that membership brings up until the point we leave the EU, and as such the Government will continue to submit the UK's convergence programme until that time.

Section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993 requires that the content of the convergence programme must be drawn from an assessment of the UK's economic and budgetary position which has been presented to Parliament by the Government for its approval. This assessment is based on the Autumn Budget 2017 report and the most recent Office for Budget Responsibility's "Economic and Fiscal Outlook" and it is this content, not the convergence programme itself, which requires the approval of the House for the purposes of the Act.

Article 121, along with Article 126 of the TFEU, is the legal basis for the stability and growth pact, which is the co-ordination mechanism for EU fiscal policies and requires member states to avoid excessive government deficits. Although the UK participates in the stability and growth pact, by virtue of its protocol to the treaty opting out of the euro, it is only required to "endeavour to avoid" excessive deficits. Unlike the euro area member states, the UK is not subject to sanctions at any stage of the European semester process.

Subject to the progress of parliamentary business, debates will be held soon in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, in order for both Houses to approve this assessment before the convergence programme is sent to the Commission. While the convergence programme itself is not subject to Parliamentary approval or amendment, I will deposit a copy of the document in the Libraries of both Houses and copies will be available through the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office in advance of the debates.

The UK's convergence programme will be available electronically via HM Treasury's website prior to it being sent to the European Commission.

[HCWS615]

#### Employer Supported Childcare

#### **The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):**

This Government are providing more help with the cost of childcare to working parents than ever before. As well as introducing Tax-Free Childcare in April 2017, they have doubled the free childcare available to working

parents of 3 and 4 year olds in England to 30 hours a week, and increased the support available through universal credit to cover up to 85% of childcare costs. In 2019-20 the government will spend around £6 billion on childcare support—a record amount.

Since opening the childcare choices service through which parents apply for 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare more than 370,000 customers have successfully applied and are now using the service. Of these, more than 335,000 parents are eligible for 30 hours free childcare. Over 210,000 have a Tax-Free Childcare account. The Government will encourage more parents to take up the offer they are entitled to.

Parents can apply via the childcare choices service for both 30 hours free childcare and Tax-Free Childcare. The application is straightforward and can be accessed via: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>

Tax-Free Childcare is a fairer and better targeted system than childcare vouchers. Through Tax-Free Childcare all families who are eligible can get support regardless of who their employer is, or whether they are self-employed, and support is based on the number of children in a family, rather than the number of parents. Tax-Free Childcare is targeted at a similar income population as childcare vouchers but will provide support to nearly 1 million more families compared to the number currently using vouchers.

The decision to phase out childcare vouchers and directly contracted childcare, and replace this support with Tax-Free Childcare was made in 2013, and received parliamentary approval through the Childcare Payments Act 2014.

Today the Government have made The Income Tax (Limited Exemptions for Qualifying Childcare Vouchers and other Childcare) (Relevant Day) Regulations 2018 (SI 2018/450). These Regulations set 4 October 2018 as the date when childcare vouchers and directly contracted childcare, part of employer supported childcare, will close to new entrants. After that date, parents who are already using vouchers can continue to do so for as long as they remain with their employer, and their employer continues to offer the scheme.

To reflect concerns about the timing of the closure of childcare vouchers and the transition to Tax-Free Childcare, the Government have decided to keep childcare vouchers open for a further six months until October. This will allow more time for Tax-Free Childcare to bed in, for awareness to increase and for families to understand the support they can receive under the scheme. Now that Tax-Free Childcare is fully rolled out, the Government will keep it under review to ensure it is delivering the support needed for working families.

[HCWS616]

## DEFENCE

### Overseas Deaths Investigations (Royal Military Police)

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** The Armed Forces Act 2011 requires Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to inspect,

and report to the Secretary of State, on the independence and effectiveness of investigations carried out by each of the three service police forces. Its most recent inspection considered the effectiveness, oversight and governance of the Royal Military Police investigations into overseas deaths. I have laid a copy of its report in the House today.

I consider this report to be positive as providing assurance from an independent civilian authority that the Royal Military Police investigates overseas deaths effectively. HMICFRS has made four recommendations and identified a number of areas for improvement. The Ministry of Defence and the Royal Military Police will continue to develop a plan to address these.

[HCWS613]

## DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Independent Review of S4C

**The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Matt Hancock):** Last year the Government appointed Euryn Ogwen Williams to lead an independent review of the Welsh language broadcaster, S4C. We commissioned this independent review to ensure that S4C has a strong and successful future in delivering high-quality content for Welsh-speaking audiences.

I am pleased today to announce the publication of the S4C independent review, "Building an S4C for the future". I would like to record my thanks to Euryn for his excellent work in considering S4C's remit, governance and funding in accordance with the terms of reference.

I am today laying before Parliament the independent review, together with the Government's response to the review, which states that we accept all of the review's recommendations for Government.

[HCWS610]

## EDUCATION

### Condition Improvement Fund

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the school system (Lord Agnew) has made the following written statement.

Today, I am announcing the allocation of £514 million for 1,556 condition improvement fund (CIF) projects across 1,299 academies and sixth-form colleges, to maintain and improve the condition of the education estate. This investment forms part of the Government's plan to ensure that every child has the opportunity of a place at a good school, whatever their background.

This announcement includes £38 million in specific projects supported by the healthy pupils capital fund (HPCF). This is additional funding provided from the revenue generated from the soft drinks industry levy (SDIL). These projects will facilitate an improvement in children's physical and mental health by increasing and improving access to and use of relevant facilities, such as: kitchen refurbishment, dining halls, changing rooms, repairs and improvements to sports facilities like sports halls, swimming pools and hydrotherapy pools.

Details of today's announcement are being sent to all applicants and a list of successful projects will be published on GOV.UK. Copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS612]

## HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Social Housing Update

**The Minister for Housing (Dominic Raab):** Nearly 2 million households have been helped to realise aspirations to own their homes through the right to buy since 1980. The right to buy gives more people the opportunity to own their home, improves social mobility and provides greater financial security. It brings the benefits of home ownership to those who would otherwise not have the opportunity.

In 2012 the right-to-buy scheme was reinvigorated and the maximum discounts were increased to realistic levels. Of the 90,730 sales since April 2010, 83,272 were under the reinvigorated scheme, demonstrating there is a continued substantial demand for the right to buy.

Our record on the provision of affordable housing is a strong one with over 357,000 affordable homes delivered since 2010. This included 257,000 homes for rent. While 69,000 local authority homes have been sold since 2010, there have been 127,000 new homes provided for social rent during the same period.

The Government are committed to a step change in council house building. However, statistics released today show that while the number of homes available for social rent has increased, some local authorities have not been building enough right-to-buy replacements to match the pace of their sales. It is clear that local authorities need to increase their rate of delivery of new homes.

Helping to support this, the Chancellor announced in the autumn Budget that we will raise the housing revenue account borrowing cap by a total of up to £1 billion in areas of high affordability pressure for local authorities who are ready to start building new homes. This will offer local authorities in such areas the opportunity to increase council house building to meet the needs of local communities.

Additionally, local authorities are able to bid alongside housing associations, or in partnership with them, for £9 billion affordable homes programme grant funding (2016-21) to deliver a wide range of affordable homes. This includes £2 billion of additional funding announced at autumn Budget to deliver affordable housing with funding also being made available for social rent in areas of acute affordability pressure. Alongside these programmes, we have also announced that local authorities and housing associations will be able to increase rents by up to CPI +1% from 2020. This will provide a stable investment environment to deliver new affordable homes.

In the spring statement we also announced a £1.67 billion funding package for London, to build 26,000 more affordable homes that the capital desperately needs. This deal, as part of the Government's commitment to actively boost affordable housing supply, will overall see 116,000 more affordable homes in London and bring the total funding for affordable housing in London to £4.8 billion. This move is a key part of supporting councils and housing associations in the city to build more homes at rents that are affordable to local people. This additional funding was granted on the condition that some of it will be used to deliver high-quality

homes for social rent. This will be in addition to continuing to deliver homes for London affordable rent, flexible shared ownership and rent to buy. At least two thirds of the homes built with this additional funding must be for rent.

As well as increasing investment in new social housing we remain committed to the right to buy, helping people into home ownership and replacing the homes sold. This year we will be rolling out a pilot of the right to buy for housing association tenants in the midlands. We have engaged with local authorities to get a better understanding of the barriers to delivering new homes. To help councils build more homes, we believe there is a case for greater flexibility on the use of receipts from right-to-buy sales. We will consult further with the sector on providing greater flexibility around how local authorities can use their right-to-buy receipts, and how to ensure that we continue to support local authorities to build more council homes. We will consider social housing issues as part of our work on the forthcoming Green Paper.

[HCWS614]

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Rohingya Crisis: Flood and Cyclone Preparedness

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt):** We have all been appalled by the terrible violence and ethnic cleansing that have taken place in Burma's Rakhine State. Nearly a million Rohingya have now fled to Bangladesh from Burma. I visited the camps where most of them are living last year and witnessed for myself the precarious conditions there.

The annual monsoon and cyclone season begins imminently, and heavy rainfall is expected over the coming months. The Rohingya refugee camps are extremely vulnerable; the latest humanitarian response plan estimates that up to 200,000 Rohingya are living in areas at risk of flooding and collapse with the rainy season. I would like to assure the House that the UK Government are doing everything they can to press for and support preparedness.

We have been struck by the magnitude of the generosity of the Government of Bangladesh in providing refuge for so many people in desperate need. It has an excellent track record in disaster preparedness and protecting the vulnerable from the impacts of floods and cyclones. It is important that such preparedness is extended to Rohingya people currently hosted in Bangladesh. We are encouraging Bangladesh to take as many measures to save lives as possible, such as allocating additional land that is at lower risk of flooding and landslides, reducing density in the existing camps and having evacuation plans in place including to safe places such as cyclone shelters.

We and Bangladesh's other friends are committed to supporting them with this. UK Government Ministers and officials have been in close contact with their Government of Bangladesh counterparts on this issue. Most recently, the Foreign Secretary and I wrote jointly to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 20 March, urging the government of Bangladesh to fully harness their expertise in this area and reaffirming our strong support.

I am proud of the role the UK is playing in response to the Rohingya crisis. The UK is a leading donor to the humanitarian effort in Bangladesh. We have committed an additional £59 million since last August, including matching £5 million of public donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) appeal. We will remain a leading donor going forward. As part of our response, we are taking a wide range of measures to improve flood and cyclone preparedness, including:

**Water, sanitation and hygiene—**DFID is working with a range of agencies to ensure that up to 250,000 people continue to have access to safe drinking water throughout the rainy season, and that latrines are constructed, maintained and relocated if necessary. More than 5,000 new latrines are being constructed and will be strategically placed throughout the camps on safe ground, and more than 6,700 unsafe latrines will be decommissioned.

**Health—**UK-supported cholera, measles and diphtheria vaccination campaigns will provide protection against some of the most common diseases in the camps, and healthcare workers are being trained and provided with technical support to ensure better coverage is in place ahead of the rainy season. Some 791,000 children under the age of seven will have been vaccinated by the end of March.

**Infrastructure and access—**UN agencies, with UK support, have started mitigation works, including site improvements. Given the topography and recent deforestation of the land, this will not be sufficient to guard against all landslide risk or prevent flooding everywhere in the camps. The focus is on ensuring sustained access for the delivery of aid throughout the rainy season by improving drainage, maintaining access roads, and reinforcing embankments and walkways.

**Shelter improvements—**the UK is working with the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to ensure that the most at-risk households—more than 158,000 people—are provided with reinforced shelter materials and sandbags, to protect from high winds and flood water.

**Pre-positioning of relief supplies—**DFID made use of contingency stockpiles in the early stages of this humanitarian response. DFID has successfully supported previous cyclone responses in Bangladesh using prepositioned supplies and maintains humanitarian stockpiles with ready access to Bangladesh in both India and Dubai.

Rohingya women and children are also vulnerable to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation. The UK is leading the way in supporting a range of organisations providing specialised help to survivors of sexual violence in Bangladesh. This includes 19 women's centres offering a safe space, psycho-social support and activities to women and girls, 30 Child Friendly Spaces supporting children with protective services and psychological support, case management for nearly 2,200 survivors of sexual violence and 13 sexual and reproductive health clinics.

[HCWS608]

## PRIME MINISTER

### Machinery of Government Changes

**The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May):** This written statement confirms that the data policy and governance functions of the Government Digital Service (GDS) will transfer from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The transfer includes responsibility for data sharing (including co-ordination of part 5 of the Digital Economy Act 2017), data ethics, open data and data governance. At the same time policy responsibility for digital signatures will move from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to DCMS, which will

also jointly lead with BEIS on the relationship with the Open Data Institute, Digital Catapult and the Alan Turing Institute.

These changes will be effective from 1 April. The expanded Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport brings together in one place data policy for both government and the wider economy. This will support work, led by DCMS, to ensure the UK is fully realising the benefits of the data economy for all.

GDS will continue its work supporting the ongoing digital transformation of government, building digital capability in the civil service and championing service design across government to meet user needs.

Further to the Budget announcement last autumn, strategic geospatial data policy initiatives from BEIS and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs are being consolidated into the Cabinet Office from 1 April to support the work of the Geospatial Commission.

[HCWS609]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Welfare Reform

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey):** This Government are committed to providing young people with the support they need to get started with their working lives. We do this through providing

financial support when it is needed, and support to either “earn or learn”—delivered through the simplified universal credit (UC) benefits system. In line with this aim, I am today announcing that the Government will amend regulations so that all 18 to 21 year olds will be entitled to claim support for housing costs in UC.

Currently, 18 to 21 year-olds who make a new claim to UC in UC full service areas need to meet certain requirements in order to receive housing support. The change I am announcing today means that young people on benefits will be assured that if they secure a tenancy, they will have support towards their housing costs in the normal way.

Young people in return will have a youth obligation—an intensive package of labour market support for 18 to 21 year-olds looking to get into work. We are committed to providing targeted support for young people so that everyone, no matter what their start in life, is given the very best chance of getting into work.

This decision ensures that there are no unintended barriers to young people accessing housing on the basis of their age alone and getting into work, and is in line with the Government’s launch of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and our commitment to eradicating rough sleeping by 2027.

[HCWS611]

# Petitions

Thursday 29 March 2018

## OBSERVATIONS

### EDUCATION

#### National Admissions Policy For Faith Schools

*The petition of residents of Telford,*

Declares that the national admissions policy for faith schools is discriminatory; further that the Department for Education should abolish its current policy of a 50 per cent cap on faith-based school admissions; and, further, that a petition on this matter has gathered 155 signatures.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Department for Education to remove the 50 per cent cap on faith-based admissions, so that every child of faith can have access to faith school education.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Lucy Allan, *Official Report*, 29 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 646.]

[P002101]

*Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):*

The Government remain committed to its long standing partnership with faith schools, which make up a third of all state-funded schools.

Church and other faith schools make a hugely positive contribution to our education system as consistently high-performing and popular schools. Many faith schools also work hard to promote and support integration and community cohesion. We want to make sure all children learn the values that underpin our society, which is why education was at the heart of the Integrated Communities Strategy.

Every child deserves access to a good school place and we want parents to have greater choice when it comes to their child's school.

We have made it clear that we want to create more good school places and that includes Church and other faith schools. Where there is parental demand and where there is a need for places, we want to support the creation of those new schools.

We will set out our response to the “Schools that work for everyone” consultation in due course.

#### Provision of LGBT inclusive education in schools

*The petition of residents of the UK,*

Declares that there are benefits of inclusive teaching of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) to ensure that no child is left in ignorance; further that the Government should pledge that the updated SRE guidelines for mandatory SRE in all schools will be LGBT inclusive, which it is yet to do; and further that recent agreements made by the Government with a party which is not sympathetic to LGBT inclusive SRE following the general

election on June 8th 2017, causes concern that education that is appropriate and LGBT inclusive, could be put at risk.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to ensure that LGBT inclusive SRE is to be granted mandatory status in all schools in order that future generations leave schools informed on such matters of equality and personal safety having been educated correctly about sexual relations.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Emma Hardy, *Official Report*, 20 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 131.]

[P002103]

*Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):*

The Government's ambition is to support all young people to stay safe and prepare them for life in modern Britain. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality or identity, should feel that relationships education and relationships and sex education (RSE) are relevant to them and sensitive to their needs. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 places a duty on the Secretary of State to make relationships education in primary and RSE in secondary compulsory through regulations. The Act also provides a power for the Secretary of State to make, following a thorough consideration of the subject, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) compulsory in all schools.

The Government have been conducting a thorough engagement process with a wide range of expert stakeholders, including those representing the interests of LGBT groups such as Stonewall and Terrence Higgins Trust, to help reach evidence-based decisions on what RSE may look like. This engagement also included a call for evidence, which invited views from teachers, parents, children and young people, and other interested organisations, on age-appropriate content in the updated curriculum subjects. This included mental wellbeing, staying safe online, and LGBT issues.

The call for evidence closed on 12 February 2018 and has provided the Government with a significant number of responses from a wide range of stakeholders. The findings gathered from the call for evidence will be combined with the evidence from discussions with stakeholders to support any decisions on RSE content. From this, the Government will develop the regulations and accompanying statutory guidance for these subjects and both will be subject to public consultation followed by a debate on the regulations in Parliament.

We expect RSE to be inclusive and to meet the needs of all young people. All schools will be required to have regard to the statutory guidance and ensure that RSE and relationships education is age-appropriate. Schools are also encouraged to develop their practice when teaching about LGBT and gender diversity, with the support of reputable specialist organisations.

#### Sherburn Hill School, County Durham

*The petition of residents of Sherburn Hill,*

Declares that the proposed closure of Sherburn Hill school in County Durham is contrary to the wishes of the local residents and that children will have to attend other schools in other villages; further that the community at Sherburn Hill have already lost all other existing

community facilities, including a Sure Start centre and a community centre, and that the closure of this school will represent the closure of the last communal indoor space in the village; further that Durham County Council have not fully investigated other options for keeping the school open.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to call on Durham County Council to reconsider the decision to close Sherburn Hill school.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods, *Official Report*, 6 February 2018; Vol. 635, c. 1464.]

[P002108]

*Observations from the Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb):*

Local authorities are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area to meet the needs of the local population. This includes reviewing provision where populations have grown or declined. Consequently, local authorities have the power to close additional sites of community schools.

All decisions relating to significant changes at maintained schools are taken at a local level. Ministers and departmental officials do not have a role in these decisions. The final decision on proposals to close an additional site of a community school are made by the local authority.

If a local authority wishes to propose the closure of an additional site for a maintained school, they must follow the process set out in the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. The process for making changes to existing maintained schools follows a well-established four-stage statutory process.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Myanmar's Muslim ethnic minority

*The petition of residents of Stretford and Urmston,*

Declares that urgent action should be taken to stop the violence against Myanmar's Muslim ethnic minority, the Rohingya, including genocide, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; further declares that the petitioners cannot continue to stand by and watch the displacement of hundreds and thousands as a genocide unfolds; further declares that the petitioners note that the Rohingya Muslims are not currently recognised as citizens in Myanmar; and further urges the implementation of the Rakhine commission recommendations chaired by Kofi Annan.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the UK Government to make representation to the government of Myanmar to cease all violence in Myanmar; further to call for immediate entry aid into Myanmar; further to call for the UK not to supply arms or military training to the military; and further to call on the UK government to do all within its powers to ensure the perpetrators are brought to the international court of justice to be tried for crimes against humanity.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Kate Green, *Official Report*, Thursday 1 February 2018; Vol. 635, c. 1084.]

[P002104]

*Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson):*

We remain deeply concerned by what is happening to the Rohingya. This is a major humanitarian crisis created by Burma's military. The British Government have been clear in their condemnation of the terrible atrocities that have occurred in Rakhine State. We recognise this has been ethnic cleansing, and may also amount to crimes against humanity. Some 700,000 have fled from Burma to Bangladesh since late August 2017 and over 100 people a day are still crossing the border.

The UK has played a leading role in the international diplomatic and humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis and will continue to do so. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi regularly since the start of the crisis, and met her in Burma in February to speak to her about finding a solution to the humanitarian crisis for the Rohingya. He expressed his deep concern over the current situation and urged Burma to work with the international community to create conditions to allow Rohingya refugees to return safely, voluntarily and in dignity to their homes in Rakhine under international oversight. He also visited northern Rakhine and Bangladesh, where he visited Cox's Bazar and heard first hand from Rohingya refugees about the terrible experiences they have been put through. The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field) has also visited Burma twice since this crisis began and made the same representations to the State Counsellor and the Defence Minister.

The UK has now raised Burma six times at the UN Security Council, and proposed and secured a presidential statement on 6 November 2017, the first Council product on Burma for 10 years. This has delivered a clear message from the international community that the Burmese authorities must urgently: protect civilians and allow refugees to return safely, voluntarily and in dignity, and allow full humanitarian access. The statement stressed the importance of transparent investigations into allegations of human rights violations, and holding to account all those responsible for such acts. On 13 February, the UK used a Security Council meeting to reiterate its call for a formal role for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in any returns process, and make clear the crisis would continue to demand Security Council attention.

Elsewhere within the UN, the UK has worked with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to prepare and co-sponsor a UN General Assembly resolution on Burma. This was passed in December with the support of 135 member states and serves as a powerful message to the Burmese authorities of the damage being done to Burma's international reputation. Additionally, the UK co-sponsored the resolution on Burma passed by the special session of the UN Human Rights Council on 5 December 2017, and is currently working with fellow members of the Human Rights Council to determine what further action should be taken. The UK was central to the establishment of the UN fact-finding mission, which delivered its interim report to the UN Human Rights Council on 12 March. The UK will continue to support the FFM's important work ahead of its final report to the UN HRC in September. The UK will continue to work with international partners to

maintain pressure on Burma's civilian Government to allow a credible investigation and ensure accountability for the perpetrators of any crimes. We are looking at how to support those already collecting evidence and testimony.

The UK Government have deployed two civilian experts to Bangladesh who have made detailed recommendations on the investigation and documentation of sexual violence, which we are now actively implementing. The FCO funds capacity building for Bangladeshi partners on investigation and documentation of sexual violence to international standards, and is funding mentors and trainers in Bangladesh to deliver capacity building on investigation and documentation of sexual violence in conflict.

The UK has committed an additional £59 million to the Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, making it one of the largest bilateral donors. This aid is making a big difference on the ground, including providing food to 174,000 people, safe water and sanitation for more than 138,000 people and emergency shelter for over 130,000 people. In addition, emergency nutrition support will reach more than 60,000 children under five and 21,000 pregnant and lactating women. Medical help will assist over 50,000 pregnant women to give birth safely. Counselling and psychological support will reach over 10,000 women suffering from the trauma of war and over 2,000 survivors of sexual violence. Full humanitarian access to northern Rakhine remains urgently needed. We continue to call on the Burmese authorities to allow immediate and full humanitarian access and support for the people and communities affected.

The UK continues to support the EU's retention of its arms embargo, which prohibits the supply of equipment or the provision of any training that might strengthen the Burmese military's combat capability. The UK was instrumental in its extension last year, and secured agreement at the EU Foreign Affairs Council on 26 February to ensure it is renewed and strengthened, as well as agreement to begin the process of introducing targeted sanctions on individual senior military officers responsible for serious and systematic human rights violations.

The UK 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. Previous co-operation consisted of educational courses focused on governance, accountability, ethics, human rights and international law. The UK has not provided any form of combat training to the Burmese military.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Nature reserves in Dudley South

*The petition of residents of Dudley South,*

Declares that Barrow Hill and Buckpool & Fens Pool Nature Reserves, including the Dingle and the Leys, are being blighted by the actions of motorcyclists and quadbikers who have no regard for the local environment, residents and wildlife, are causing damage to the reserve and are causing a nuisance.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to work with Dudley Council, West Midlands Police and other authorities, to take immediate action to safeguard our nature reserves; further that Dudley Council should create a Public Space Protection Order as set out in the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014; further that, by using this power and taking action against offenders, Dudley Council and West Midlands Police will be able to reduce the negative impact current behaviour has on local residents and wilder wildlife.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mike Wood, *Official Report*, 28 February 2018; Vol. 636, c. 929.]

[P002116]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins):*

The Government recognise the importance of protecting our public spaces, including nature reserves, from those who would seek to damage them or otherwise cause nuisance in them. There are existing powers that can be used by Dudley Council and West Midlands police to help them to do this.

First, the police have the power under section 59 of the Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles, including motorcycles where they are being used in a careless and inconsiderate manner, contrary to the Road Traffic Act 1988, and in a manner causing alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public. While the use of this power is an operational matter for the police, it is a power that can be used to prevent and deter people from causing nuisance and damage to the Barrow Hill and the Buckpool and Fens Pool Nature Reserves through the antisocial use of motorcycles or quadbikes.

Secondly, it is open to Dudley Council to consult on whether to make a public spaces protection order to restrict the nuisance or antisocial behaviour that is having a detrimental effect on the two nature reserves. The Council will need to be satisfied that the legal tests set out in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 are met before making such an order.



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**not later than  
Thursday 5 April 2018**

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